

# REPORT

Living Waterways Award  
for Di Skilbeck  
— see page 6



**BMS**  
BOAT MUSEUM SOCIETY



**HERITAGE  
BOATYARD**  
Working together to keep history afloat

**Number 214  
September 2016**

**WILFORD**

# THE BOAT MUSEUM SOCIETY

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Vice Presidents: Tony Hales CBE, Harry Arnold MBE, Alan Jones, Tony Lewery

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Contributions for RE:PORT which is published four times a year are always welcome.

**Copy date for RE:PORT 215 – Wednesday 16th November**

All views expressed in RE:PORT are those of the contributors concerned and should not be taken as being the policy of The Boat Museum Society, The National Waterways Museum or The Canal and River Trust.

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## Dates for your Diary

### October

- 11 Tue **IWA** Derek Kemp: *The history and building of the Kiel Canal*
- 18 Tue **EPL&FHS** Barbara Swann: *Wrestling* (to be confirmed)
- 21 Fri **BMS** Celia Webber of the EPL&FHS: *Local History, Local Families*

### November

- 8 Tue **IWA** *Daniel Adamson – the story continues*
- 15 Tue **EPL&FHS** Mike Royden – a continuation of the popular WW1 talk he gave last year.
- 18 Fri **BMS** Julie Sharman, Head of Asset Management & Performance within CRT. What it involves & how Julie's career within BW and CRT developed.

### December

- 2 Fri **BMS** *Singers and Ringers: the annual BMS Carol Concert with the Wirral Singers.*
- 13 Tue **IWA** Brian Barnes: *Sailing around the World, Part 1: Gibraltar to the Pacific*
- 16 Fri **BMS** Cath Turpin: *Mrs Harley's Story – a child growing up on the boats.* Christmas Social Evening, Christmas card swap etc.
- 20 Tue **EPL&FHS** Linda Barley from the Waterways Archive on identifying old photos – plus our festive get-together.
- 17 Sat – 24 Sat *Santa Cruises: lots of help needed at the Museum!*

**BMS** meetings are held in the Rolt Centre at the National Waterways Museum, starting at 7.30. There is a bar and we have a raffle. Everyone is welcome.

**EPL&FHS** – Ellesmere Port Local & Family History Society meetings are also held in the Rolt Centre, starting at 7.30. Annual membership is £12 and visitors are welcome at £4 a meeting.

**IWA** – Inland Waterways Association meetings are held in the Mercer Suite at the Holiday Inn, Ellesmere Port, South Wirral, CH65 2AL, starting at 7.45 pm.

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This year the Society has been celebrating 45 years of achievements, the Museum at Ellesmere Port will have been open to the public for 40 years and I believe that 2016 could be another one of those years that we look back on in the future as a turning point. Particularly with the opening of the slipway, repair and refurbishment of many of the buildings, positive action being taken with regard to boats and the remarkable work that has been done by volunteers in the Lime Shed that has transformed it from what was a very untidy storage shed into a potentially superb exhibition hall.

One of the key aims of the society is to work closely with CRT and the Museum to enable it to provide the necessary long term care and attention for all the items in the collection. At the same time I think we possibly need look outwards rather more than we have done in recent years. By interacting and working with other like minded organisations, I think we can help progress many of our aims and at the same time provide a wider perspective of support to the Museum.

It is very encouraging to see that, over the past couple of years, we have arrested the previous slow decline in membership. With your support we need this positive trend to continue as it helps us in so many ways, both in indirect influence and also in active participation. The Society continues to be successful because by working closely with the museum staff and management, we can, will and do make things happen. No one section can do it alone, working together can take very practical forms at the museum by helping at events, looking after the boats, researching - any number of practical ways and for these we continue to appeal to members to support our efforts in any and every way.

Today's museum says much of the vision of those who campaigned for its establishment and the hard work of its staff and volunteers. Over the last 40 years so much has been achieved in transforming an almost derelict site into a nationally recognised museum with an extensive collection and a first-rate archive. But what of the next 40 years? The museum, now as part of the Canal and River Trust, is entering another new phase of its life where for museums like ours the commercial and financial climate is very different from that of 40 years ago. Although there are many new sources of funding the competition to attract these grants is fierce. Graham Boxer's excellent article in RE:PORT 213 gave us his vision of where the museum could be in the future and I'm sure that other professionals in the management team for the museums and Canal and River Trust have thoughts as to how the future might look, but what do you think? I would like to hear your views, whether as Trustee, Manager or 'ordinary member'. Send me your thoughts, in brief or at length, and with your approval I would be pleased to publish your responses in future editions of RE:PORT.

Finally I would like to thank all volunteers, staff and management for working so hard together to making our 40th anniversary celebrations so successful and enjoyable.

*Jeff Fairweather*

## Telling Our Story ...and looking forward to the next chapter

All organisations need to keep a firm hold on their past in order to understand how to progress in the future, and when you are responsible for a network that is, in places, nearly 250 years old, this is particularly important; whilst the Canal & River Trust may be only four years old, we know our history extends back over centuries.

How we tell our story to people, and place the inland waterways of today in their historical context, is the vital role that our two major national museums play. We are fortunate to have two such stunning sites, and such a rich and extensive collection. We can only wonder at the foresight of those who made sure so much that might have been lost was saved and handed down for us to look after. Not least in this regard are those who took the initiative a little over 40 years ago to establish the Boat Museum, whose anniversary we have recently celebrated. It was a great privilege to be a part of that event, to thank all those involved as they came together.

The museums will continue to play an essential role in the future, helping to connect the millions of people who live by or near to a canal or river navigation, whose village or town was shaped profoundly by it and the trade that it brought, with their history; or simply giving those with an interest the opportunity to learn more and deepen their involvement.

A key element of the Trust's strategy is to strengthen and widen this public engagement, to build support for our cause, so that we have a mass of individuals willing to fund, volunteer for, and campaign or lobby in support of the Trust. The museums are foremost in that engagement effort, at the heart of it, telling our story, to explain and inspire in equal measure.

It's not always been easy over the past decades to find all of the funding that any premier museum depends upon, but we can look forward with growing confidence, given the Trust's greater financial independence now that we are free from the vagaries of Government's short term budgetary changes; and most importantly given our proven ability to capture the interest and support of a wide range of new funders – from HLF and the Arts Council to the Wolfson and Esmee Fairburn Foundations, and many more. We have seen the first results of that additional funding, with the eagerly-awaited enhancements at both Gloucester and Ellesmere Port delivered by the recently-completed million pound projects, and I am thrilled by what has been achieved. It's also hugely satisfying to see Mossdale properly provided for at last, and to see plans take shape to realise a sustainable future for the historic fleet in our care.

Everyone involved has so much to be proud of; without you, we couldn't have reached this point in our journey, and we will continue to depend upon the dedication of the many volunteers and employees as we look forward optimistically to what more we can achieve.

*Richard Parry*  
CRT – Chief Executive

## Outstanding Achievement Award for Di Skilbeck

At Birmingham Town Hall on 14th September Di received the award as part of the Living Waterways Awards ceremony. These awards were established by the Canal and River Trust to celebrate the individuals, communities and organisations that have done the most to make a difference to the nation's rivers, canals, lochs, lakes, reservoirs and docks, making them exciting places to live, learn and spend time.

Presenting the award, Ricard Parry, the Trust's Chief Executive said, "Di's connection and commitment to the Museum stretches right back to the early days of restoring the site, and her inspiring dedication to the Boat Museum Society and its role in the conservation and education of the history of the waterways continues unstinted.

"Di has been a stalwart supporter and campaigner for the inland waterways and our industrial heritage. Through her work as a teacher and volunteer she has inspired countless children and helped ensure that these stories are not forgotten."

Di Skilbeck was born and educated in Bebington on the Wirral and has spent most of her life living there, apart from time at college in London and six years in Sheffield.

She has always been interested in geography and history, and in the course of studying social and economic history she came across a reference to Ellesmere Port and the connection between Thomas Telford and the dock buildings. When she visited the site in early 1974 she was horrified to see the dilapidation of the buildings and mud and rubbish which filled the canal basin. She wrote to various influential people, Sir John Betjeman, Mr Howell, minister of state, the Georgian Group and Ellesmere Port Council. She received a reply from the Council suggesting she contact a newly formed group, the North West Museum of Inland Navigation (NWMIN) who were holding a meeting in the Westminster Hotel on May 10th 1974.

Following this, she joined a work party over the week-end of December 7th and 8th 1974. She brought girls from Wirral Grammar School for Girls, where she was teaching at the time, and they cleared mud and reeds from the basin. They found some amazing items, car doors, wheels, a scooter and a safe. In those days the mud had its own smell which was difficult to wash off. They worked alongside adult volunteers and eventually, after the mud was cleared, boats could come into the basin. Many of the boats had been looked after off-site, such as *Scorpio* and *George* at Burscough, Mossdale at Northwich and



Richard Parry and Di Skilbeck cut the 40th anniversary cake on 12th June

Ethel at Wigan. Once the boats arrived, the work took on a new phase of restoring and painting to maintain these historic craft – this is an on-going task!

The opening of the first stage of the Museum took place in June 1976 and was a joint affair with Merseyside IWA. Di became a member of the NWMIN committee in 1978 and followed Tony Hirst as Working Party organiser. In 1985 she became Chairman of NWMIN until 1995 when she stood down and was appointed President of BMS. She has served on several committees, The Boat Museum Trust, the Waterways Trust, Steering committee, Volunteer Leads committee, and Events committee.

Di is still a very active part of the Education team and helps with school parties, and tours. She is also in charge of *Gifford's* maintenance, and works with a dedicated team of helpers.

In 2012 she was awarded an MBE for services to heritage and education. Di says this award recognised the work of all volunteers, past and present who contributed to the preservation and conservation of an important part of our heritage. In 2015, She was presented with an Honorary MA degree from the University of Chester. This was to mark her contribution to education, especially in Cheshire and in particular her role as President of BMS.

## Membership Matters

We would like to welcome the following new members:

**Tim and Eileen Anderton, Peter Brindley, John Inch and Keyth Vassmusson**

We also welcome the new staff and volunteers who have become BMS members.

### Membership Renewal Time

It's that time of year again, when membership subscriptions for 2016/17 are due. For those members who have not set up a standing order, please make your cheque payable to "The Boat Museum Society" and send it to The National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port CH65 4FW for the Society to receive it by 1st October 2016.

The subscriptions for 2016/17 are as follows:

Category of Membership	Subscription
Full Membership	£16
Family Membership	£25
Students/Juniors (age 12-18) no voting rights	£10
Senior Citizens and Unwaged	£10
Single Life Membership	£350
Family Life Membership	£550

Your new membership card will be sent to you with your next copy of RE:PORT which is due in December. Until then, your 2015-16 membership card will be valid and the code on the reverse will give you access to the BMS members' website. A new password will be on the reverse of your new membership card.

**THANK YOU**

## Funding Secures Bright Future for Historic Boats at the National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port and Gloucester

The recent Arts Council England (ACE) award of over £300k (£314,136), will ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy the historic boats in the care of the Canal & River Trust at the National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port and Gloucester

The Canal & River Trust collection comprises 68 nationally important boats – the majority of which are on the historic ships register. Many are still in full working order and take visitors on pleasure trips, while others are used in the museum and on-site for education purposes. Maintaining such an important collection is a mammoth task. The size and scale of the boats presents challenges. However, the ACE grant now allows the museums to focus attention on 16 vessels in Ellesmere Port which will be removed from the water for preservation. This will include drying out and storing the boats in conditions that preserve them for the enjoyment and understanding of museum visitors.

This approach is already being applied to *Mossdale*, at Ellesmere Port, the only remaining all-timber Mersey flat. A 3D scan of her structure was used to design the cradle that supports her, and the cover protects her from the weather to allow her to dry out slowly

The ACE grant will also allow the museum to develop a dry dock that will allow its experts to conserve the fleet of working boats. Meanwhile it will also enable the National Waterways Museum, Gloucester to enhance the quayside to provide a fitting backdrop to the vessels exhibited there, including the *Sabrina* which is currently being developed into an education facility.

Graham Boxer, Canal & River Trust's Head of Museums said: "This is an exciting opportunity for us. All museums face choices when deciding how best to care for their collections. Prioritising is never easy and when looking after our unique fleet we face a race against time and the elements. Now, thanks to Arts Council England, we will be able to give attention to a significant number of our vessels. They have given service to generations over decades and I am delighted that at last we are able to secure a future for them. They will then be able to help the next generations to understand their stories and the roles they played in the working life of our country."

Amongst the boats to be preserved are *Merak* and *Merope* – two important vessels in the historic fleet. The boats were built in pairs. Cargo boat *Merak* was originally paired with the motor boat *Merope* and would have been the butty towed behind her. *Merak* would have carried about 30 tons of cargo: iron, steel and other metals, coal, grain, timber, cement, stone and other general goods. The two boats were separated during their working lives before being reunited at the Boat Museum nearly 50 years later.

John Orna-Ornstein, Director of Museums at Arts Council England: "The focus of our investment approach for museums in 2015-18 is on building a more resilient sector. The Museum Resilience fund is a key part of that, providing vital support to museums right across the country. The fund responds directly to the challenges facing museums like those in Lancashire and Kirklees, and also supports major strategic initiatives such as the



Museums Association's Transformers programme."

### *Mossdale*

This huge boat is the only remaining all-timber Mersey flat. She began life as *Ruby* in the 1860s, working out of the Port of Liverpool on canals, upriver and along the coast. Despite her flat hull she was stable and could carry up to 70 tons of cargo. With no engine, she was a "dumb barge", towed by steam tug. She came to Ellesmere Port occasionally for repair.

*Ruby* was owned first by the Shropshire Union Railway & Canal Company which operated Ellesmere Port. After Abel & Sons bought her in 1920, they rebuilt her and re-named her *Mossdale*. She carried grain, flour, sugar and pottery and was known as "the best carrier on the Bridgewater Canal".

Because she is old and fragile she needs to be protected and carefully preserved. A 3D scan of her structure was used to design the cradle that supports her, and the cover protects her from the weather to allow her to dry out slowly. This is the approach we need to take with more of our important boats.

### *Merak and Merope*

During the 1930s, the Grand Union Canal was improved through a Government employment scheme. The Grand Union Canal Carrying Company, anticipating extra tonnage, saw this scheme as an opportunity for expansion. They ordered 12 pairs of 'star class' boats, so called as the craft were named after stars and constellations. *Merak* and *Merope* were one of these pairs built in 1936. They worked in a pair with *Merope*, a motor boat, towing *Merak* as a butty behind her. The two boats were separated later in their working life but were reunited at the National Waterways Museum in Ellesmere Port (then The Boat Museum) in 1985.

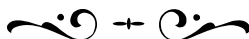
These boats were built by W. H. Walker and Brothers at Frogmore Wharf, Rickmansworth in Hertfordshire and registered at Rickmansworth on 21.4.1936. They were known as 'Small Rickies'.

### *Merak*

*Merak* is a wooden, unpowered, butty boat which was built in 1936 for the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company. *Merak* was built as part of a pair and was originally paired with the motor boat *Merope*. She would have carried around 30 tons of cargo including iron, steel, coal, grain and timber as well as general goods. Having overstretched themselves at a time when canal transportation was in decline, the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company decided to reduce their fleet to 100 boats. In 1948 *Merak* was sold to the Mersey Weaver & Ship Canal Company Ltd. who were based in Stoke. During this time two different families were registered as living on *Merak*. In the 1950s, *Merak* was purchased by the 1st Hazel Grove Sea Scouts and underwent some major alterations including fitting an engine in her former living cabin. She was kept on the Macclesfield Canal and renamed *The Chief* in honour of their scout leader. In 1972, *Merak* was bought by Jimmy Hewitt with the intention of using her for commercial use again. She was then sold to Malcolm Webster in 1974 who carried out extensive restoration of her at his boatyard. The Boat Museum Trust purchased *Merak* in 1985.

### Merope

*Merope* is a wooden, motor narrowboat built in 1936 for the Grand Union Canal Carrying Company. She was originally paired with the butty boat *Merak*. During her working life she carried all types of general cargoes on the Grand Union Canal between London and Birmingham. In 1941, *Merope* was sold to the Stanton Coal & Iron Company and registered at Ilkeston. She was later sold to Joseph Rayner, a canal carrier, of Runcorn in 1947 who renamed her *Sandra*. In 1955, she was purchased by the coal merchants S T Brant of Hockley Port, Birmingham and, after extensive repairs including fitting a new twin-cylinder Bolinder engine, renamed *Gertrude*. Once her refurbishment was completed she did three trips a week towing a day boat carrying coal from the Cannock coal fields to Brant's Wharf in Birmingham. From 1965–1969 *Merope* worked for the Birmingham & Midland Canal Carrying Company but with constant repairs needed she was displaced in favour of the steel boats. She was then sold to Dodds, Peters & Co. of Netherton. When she was repainted in 1975, and the many layers of paint were removed, her original name *Merope* was discovered. Peter Dodds was a member of a group of canal enthusiasts and *Merope* was put to use raising other abandoned wooden narrowboats. *Merope* was purchased in 1985 from Peter Dodds for the Boat Museum at Ellesmere Port.



## 40th Anniversary – 12 June 2016

The 40th Anniversary had two important strands to it. One strand was the inviting of people who were around at the opening of the museum, the other strand was the creation of an exhibition telling the story of the establishment of the museum.

Sending out the invitations was quite a challenge, trying to remember all those who were to be invited and then to find their addresses, hoping these were current addresses. Tony Hirst supplied a list of names and addresses and Barbara Kay identified several from the database. Up to a few days before the event we were still gathering names and addresses! Special thanks to Michelle and Beth for sending out the invitations.

Gathering information and pictures for the exhibition was undertaken by a small group led by Zofia Kufeldt. Inviting Harry Arnold, Tony Hirst and Tony Lewery to be part of the group produced a fantastic amount of information, art work, and pictures. We were overwhelmed with material and it was thanks to Headland Design that so much material was included. We read and re-read the text, Cath Turpin sourced many pictures from the archives and eventually we got pictures of the panels back for checking.

Zofia kept her guiding hand on the exhibition and came up with some novel sections, involving present day volunteers. She and her colleagues painted the theatre before the exhibition was installed. As with earlier exhibitions at the museum, the work was finished the night before opening! The day itself went off very successfully, the greeting and guiding worked well, people had time to look at the exhibition, the buffet was magnificent and the cake was most impressive. Thanks to Natalie and her team for the buffet and to Michelle for the cake. The room looked superb with fresh white cloths on the tables and



very attractive flower arrangements. Thanks to Jim and Barbara for their work in getting the room laid out.

Our photographers, Chris Kay, Chris Bacon and Julie (Arnold) Summers were blessed with a fine interlude to take some brilliant photographs. The re-creation of photographs 40 years ago was cleverly managed and involved a boat moving team comprised of Liz Fairweather, Peter McOnie, Nigel Carpenter, and Daniel Sheldon, who spent Saturday morning moving the boats around! Chris Kay and his guides ensured that people saw many areas of the museum which had changed from previous years.

Di Skilbeck introduced Graham Boxer and Richard Parry, both of whom spoke to the assembled company and highlighted the commitment of the early volunteers, without whom there would be no museum. Graham and Richard applauded volunteers for their on-going commitment and were keen to support and encourage the continued development of the museum.

Many people were involved in the organisation of the day, grateful thanks to each and every one. The group who need special mention are those who cleared up, washed up without a dishwasher and ensured that the museum facilities were restored for use the next day.

In addition to this celebratory event, BMS has produced a special 40th anniversary edition of RE:PORT, its quarterly newsletter. It is an excellent edition, packed with items relating to the museum's history, and anecdotes of those who volunteered during the early years – and some who are still doing so!

I guess we now say, 'Forward to the 50th'!

*Di Skilbeck MBE*

## 40 years on – Secrets Unlocked at Ellesmere Port.

On the 2nd and 3rd July we publicly celebrated our 40th anniversary of the Museum, with many of the volunteers and families back at the museum exactly 40 years on.

It also saw the unveiling of a new exhibition – ‘Window on the World’. Visitors can now experience life through the eyes of 19th century workers on the historic slipway using augmented reality, and meet carpenter Henry Leadbetter, boatwoman Harriet Price and superintendent Levi William Lindop.

The ‘father of English canals’ James Brindley was born 300 years ago and the museum marks his pioneering career with an exhibition of his life and times in Brindley 300. The exhibition runs until 2nd October 2016.

In Spring this year, the local waterway team began to bring the wide lock back to life. Once drained of its 120,000 gallons of water, the original brickwork was revealed, together with a timber plank dating back to 1795. The old gates, installed in 1975 and 1991, were replaced with new ones, hand crafted in the Canal & River Trust’s specialist workshops at Bradley in the West Midlands and Stanley Ferry in Yorkshire.

Over the weekend, the 5.5 metre deep empty lock took on a new role – as a temporary visitor attraction: hundreds of people ventured down into the depths to enjoy a unique perspective on the huge hand-crafted gates, each one weighing a staggering 3.3 tonnes.

The museum team were on hand to tell the story of the port. They described how, at its peak in the 1830s, massive quantities of the materials needed to fuel the Industrial Revolution passed through the locks. They also explained how a single lock gate can take up to 20 days to build and has a working life of 25–30 years. In order to be watertight they need to be precision-built, fitting tightly into the masonry of the lock wall and to each other.

### ... and some colourful visitors on 3 July

Quite by chance, the Liverpool Steam Punk Group had booked a guided tour on 3 July and they certainly provided some additional colour to the weekend’s celebrations.

*Museum Times, July 2016*



**Liverpool Steam Punk Group**  
(Steampunk is a subgenre of science fiction that incorporates technology and aesthetic designs inspired by 19th century industrial steam-powered machinery.)

## Horses at Work and at War

For 200 years canal boats were powered by horses. That is a key message of the annual “Horses at Work” event held on 14 August. During this centenary period of the First World War it has been expanded to include “. . . and at War”. The wartime theme was provided by historian Kate Vigurs who captured the imagination of her audiences with her presentation “The Horse’s Tale” about the role of women, and horses, during WWI. Kate was ably assisted by Sue Day’s horse Bilbo. BMS member Nigel Dix also looked impressive in his WWI uniform, and showed his and Sue’s historic military horse tack and packhorse panniers – now vary rare.



The “what the towpaths were for” theme was as always popular with visitors many of whom followed boathorse Bonny as she pulled horseboat *Gifford* along to the winding hole and back.

Preserving the traditional skills of the waterways is a BMS objective, and the Boat Activity Group demonstrated that not only do they have the skills to operate historic motor boats, but also as the crew of *Gifford* they possess the specialist skills of navigating a horseboat.

Sue Day demonstrated traditional boathorse harnessing, and showed her carriage horse Castle. Farrier Nick Freak explained the care of hooves and the uses of his specialist tools and equipment.

A big hit with the public was the wagonette which gave rides right around the greater dock area, pulled by two handsome horses Charlie and Duke. Each circuit was accompanied by Norman Stainthorp or Chris Kay (also both handsome) giving a running commentary of the historic features. The passengers returned full of appreciation. For the logistics involved in making sure that everyone who wanted to had chance to have a ride, we are grateful to Di Ascott and Connor.

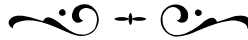
The Archive was open for visitors, as were Porters Row cottages with the interpreters in costume, and the Waterways Craft Group were in attendance – housed in the Activity Room ('Boat Hall') because of a slight glitch the previous day.

What glitch? Well, a burst water main in the island warehouse on the Saturday had drastically flooded the ground floor and knocked out the Museum electrics, and the Museum had to close for that day. Urgent repairs by contractors, combined with valiant physical effort by Graham Boxer, Chris Kay and Jeff Fairweather ensured that none of the ground floor exhibits were seriously damaged, and Barbara Kay's quiet efficiency at the front of house sorted out problems and kept everyone calm. Late on the Saturday the decision was made that "Horses at Work and at War" could go ahead, albeit without the use of the island warehouse.

There are too many other people to thank individually for contributing to the success of the day – many thanks to you all.

The Horses at Work event has been held for several years now, and perhaps it is due for a 'revamp'. If you have any thoughts or suggestions for changes or new activities for the day, but still with the historical theme of horsepower on the canals, then please pass your ideas on to BMS Chairman Jeff Fairweather.

*Ken Catford*



## The Slipway opens

In just under a year, the slipway has been transformed from a neglected area of the site into a brand new exhibition space. At the beginning of July, the slipway opened to the public. This project has seen the museum's historic slipway transformed from a neglected storage area to a new exhibition space.

The slipway was built as part of the new dock complex which opened in 1843. It was built to in design of a Morton patent slip, which features a cradle mounted on a railway which originally ran into the River Mersey. The cradle would settle on the riverbed and a boat would float onto the cradle with the tide. It would then be hauled up the slipway to allow from repair works to take place. The Morton Patent Slip was considered to be an



27th August 2015



1st July 2016

effective and economical method of removing a boat from the water to inspect or repair the hull. It also reduces the risk of damage to a vessel hull in the hauling up process. With the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal in the 1890s, the slip no longer had access to the tidal Mersey and works took place to extend the slipway upwards and a winching mechanism was added into help haul the boats out of the Ship Canal. In the early 20th century, three buildings were built taking the slipway to its current features. The early 20th century was a period of growth for the slipway. However, the slipway fell out of use in the 1920s after the Manchester Ship Canal Company took control of dock complex from the Shropshire Union.

Before any work could be started on the slipway, the entire area needed to be cleared. The boats and winches that were being stored on the slipway were transferred to the museum's storage facility in Northwich. The next stage of the project was to start work on the building to make them suitable to become display areas. This was no easy feat, with each building needing significant amount of work. This include a complete rebuild of the smallest building on the site and extensive carpentry work was needed on the winch house. The inside of the carpenters' workshop needed to be rubbed down to remove peeling paint before any internal painting could be done. On top of this all four building needed to be painted both inside and out and new windows fitted

In order to interpret this part of the site we needed to know exactly how the slip was operated. This was not an easy task, considering that there are no longer any original features of the slip in position. Some of the rail and ratchet was salvaged in the 1990s when the access road was built. However, there was no evidence of the type of engine, winch or boilers that were used to power the system. Nor was there any indication to how the cradle was attached to the winch.

Using a mixture of archival records and volunteer technical knowledge we were able to decode how the mechanisms of the slip worked. We found that the extended slip was originally powered by gas but was converted back to steam by 1908. SU minutes suggest that the engine had been recycled from the boat Avast. Less is known on how the original slipway was operated. We uncovered a newspaper advert from in 1844 which states that the slipway used powerful machinery. However, no further details are given and we have yet been able to determine what was meant by powerful machinery.



4th January 2016



11th August 2016



4th January 2016



11th August 2016

Another area researched was into the lives of the men who worked there. There was one known character linked to the slipway, Levi William Lindop who was the superintendent at the dock from 1892 to 1922 and had an office down on the slipway. However, there was little information available about other employees. Using transcripts of oral histories and the museum findmypast.com account we were able to discover more about who these men were and also build up connections between them. Our focus was on employees who worked here in 1911 the date that the slipway was being set up. Four of these men and one boatwoman were then used as part of the augmented reality for the site. These characters come to live on visitors' phones or tablets to explain different aspects of the work that took place on the slip. The boatwoman Hattie is used to create the link between Mersey Flats and how Ellesmere Port provided a gateway between the Midlands and Liverpool docks. There are plans for other characters researched to be used in costumed interpretation at the museum adding another layer of visitor experience to the site.

There is still a significant amount of work planned to improve the visitor experience of the slipway. Over the next two months the carpenters' workshop and the outdoor space will be populated to give a better representation of a working boatyard. More tools will be added to the display in the carpenter's workshop, either secured to the walls or displayed on top of the work benches. Boat patterns will be fixed to the walls to help give a representation of the type of work that would have taken place. Other items to be introduced into the workshop are a grindstone, vice and sawing stools. The outside space on the slip will initially have some sawing stools, wooden ladders, barrels and crates added to the upper part of the slipway near the winch house. Some planks of wood will also be used as part of this set dressing. In the future a replica cradle will be built and installed on the slip, a chain will be attached to it and fed through the wooden grate in the winch house. This will give a greater perspective to the size of the crafts that were hauled up the slip to be repaired. In addition to this the mess room will receive its own set dressing. There will also be further additions to the Superintendent's Hut and the winch house over the next few months, including some facsimiles of Lindop's technical drawings. After this work is complete each individual building will be able to tell a different aspect of life on the slipway.

*Hannah Holmes*



## National Waterways Museum collections development project

The Esmée Fairburn Collections Fund, administered by the Museums Association, awarded funding to the Canal and River Trust in 2015 to address issues affecting the museum boat collection. This project deals with three important areas: collections storage, collections significance and collections access.

One of the main reasons for this project is to identify solutions to create a manageable and sustainable collection that represents the diversity of inland waterways heritage while also protecting its Designated status. At present, many of the vessels, some very significant, are at risk. This situation is largely as a result of lack of resources to develop, deliver and document planned boat collection maintenance, to museum standards. The final output of this project phase will be a report that will include findings, recommendations and a statement of significance for each vessel.

Recent activity has focussed on collections significance. To achieve a consistent and objective assessment, we have based our work on the methodology devised by National Historic Ships. We have now produced Statements of Significance for each vessel. This has allowed us to gain an understanding of the individual and collective importance of the vessels and to see where strengths and weaknesses exist. The boat collection needs to be considered in its entirety if the museum is to achieve a well-looked after and significant heritage asset.

With the support of the museum, we have been able to make good progress and are now into an important consultation stage. Having produced Statements of Significance for each vessel in the collection, we have been able to discuss our early findings with museum staff and volunteers. This process is invaluable, capturing critical knowledge not previously documented. These conversations form part of this current project phase of consultation and dissemination of findings and recommendations. To date we have consulted with volunteers at Ellesmere Port, where most of the collection is located, the Chairs of Friends' Groups and members of CRT senior management. In addition, we are talking to relevant museum and heritage sector organisations, such as National Historic Ships and Arts Council England. This process will continue over the next few weeks as we ensure that a range of views and knowledge informs our final report.

This consultation will be followed by the presentation of findings and recommendations. Our final report will enable the museum to make sound decisions about the boat collection's future.

*Emma Chaplin & Rachel Mulhearn*

**Emma Chaplin** is former Keeper of Collections at National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port and is now a museums consultant and collections management specialist.

**Rachel Mulhearn** is former Director of Merseyside Maritime Museum and now works independently with museums and heritage sites across the UK.

## Education News

Since my last article we have been busy running events and family activities as well as our usual school visits. In June we organised a schools week in the run up to Lymm Transport Festival. This was held in Lymm Community Centre and was delivered in partnership with the Transport Festival and *Saturn*. We engaged more schools than ever this year, adding an extra day to the programme. In total, over 200 primary school children attended. They experienced going aboard a heritage boat, learned about up thrust and streamlining as well as participating in a bridge building challenge. Feedback was incredibly positive and we all thoroughly enjoyed the experience



Our Young Curators group were successful in achieving their Junior Lock Keeper certificates in July. They took part in a nine week course, learning the history of locks, how they work, operational safety and managing groups around locks. Their assessment consisted of giving a lock demonstration to a group of their families, teachers and class mates. The Young Curators worked as a team to escort a boat through the locks, whilst at the same time, explaining to the group what was happening. Thank you to the boat activity group who helped immensely with this training programme. A new group of Young Curators will be recruited in September. Due to the success of the programme, we will be opening the opportunity up to a larger group of children.

Also during July, we took full advantage of the lock stoppage, offering visiting schools the opportunity to visit the dewatered lock as part of their day. Pupils and teachers really valued the experience and were particularly excited to see the paddles at the bottom of the lock gates. A huge thank you to Andrew and his team for allowing us to halt work and for explaining what they were doing so eloquently and with such good humour!

The historic slipway exhibition and Window on the World app were both launched just at the end of the school term. It was fantastic to be able to add the augmented reality experience to the visit for the last few school groups. Children were able to borrow the museum ipads and increase their understanding of this important site. They particularly enjoyed visiting the superintendent's office.

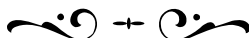


Currently, the education team is running family activities every Tuesday, getting involved with costumed interpretation and preparing for an event on the 4th September in partnership with the makers of the TV show "Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom".

We have introduced a play area in the Island Warehouse, to temporarily replace the soft play area. This links with the new James Brindley exhibition and encourages children to engineer and construct their own canal related structures, using Kapla building blocks.

Finally, we have the exciting news that *George* will soon be returning to the museum for the winter, before heading to the Leeds & Liverpool Canal in May 2017. For further information about *George's* journey please feel free to contact me.

*Helen Evans*



## The Waterways Archive & the media

I think it's fair to say that archives and archivists have suffered from something of an image problem down the years. Any of you familiar with the novels of Mervyn Peake will know the sort of thing I mean. An eccentric character hiding away from the world, covered in cobwebs in a gothic turret surrounded by dusty manuscripts and ancient volumes. Whilst that's a caricature, those of us who have worked in the sector for a quarter of a century or more will recognise some truth in it. However in recent years things have changed. To some degree this has been driven by television history and also by the recent explosion in the interest in family history. Both phenomena have pointed up the potential of filming in archive strong rooms and searchrooms and have dragged archivists kicking and screaming on to the small screen.

At the risk of sounding a bit 'dad at the disco', old stuff is now officially cool. Over the last twenty years or so I've appeared on several national and regional news programmes, Time Team, antiques programmes, television history programmes and countless radio programmes, including a stint on a family history 'phone in' programme on BBC Radio Lancashire. And since I've been working for Canal & River Trust hardly a week has gone by that we haven't dealt with an enquiry from a television production company. We've supplied images and information for all of the 'Timothy & Pru' programmes, for *Barging Around Britain* with John Sargeant (seems like a long time since he was the BBC's Political Editor), *Canals: Making of a Nation*, and for the Slow TV production on BBC4. For those of you that didn't see the latter, it basically consisted of a two hour canal journey filmed in real time and augmented with archive footage. Channel 5 have just commissioned a new programme which is, I gather, going to feature some older celebrities at various locations on the canal network, including the Llangollen Canal, and reflecting on their lives as they do. Like me, you may be wondering if soon every single programme on television will be about canals.

Long may it continue. It's sure to generate growing interest in the waterways and is of course testimony to how much people like being near water. It gets the archive 'out there'. And it's a great shop window for Canal & River Trust.

*John Benson*  
*Planet Archive*

## Volunteering together!

Dedicated. Passionate. Committed. Just a few words to describe the volunteers who tirelessly support the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port.

Whether it's clearing the weeds and debris from the canal, researching in the archives, greeting visitors or cleaning the collection in Porters Row, it is clear that volunteers are at the heart of everything we do.

Building on the strong foundations laid by BMS who are very much working in partnership with Canal & River Trust, the 125 strong team of volunteers continue to strive towards creating an open, friendly, professional museum where people want to come back to time and time again.

Together we are striving to provide a diverse and appealing range of opportunities which supports and delivers the strategic aims of Canal & River Trust and the business objectives of the museum.

Capturing the wealth of experience of the team through mentoring and training programmes, we aim to create a plan which will attract new volunteers to get involved whilst ensuring that the existing team's contribution is recognised as integral to the future of the museum.

By developing and enhancing the museum's works programme to reflect the needs of the museum with customer service and collections care at the core, we aim, in a competitive volunteer market, to improve the profile and quality of opportunities by providing a joined up approach as to how we engage with new volunteers as well as encourage existing volunteers to stay involved.

In summary we are aiming to provide a unique portfolio of opportunities and training which will attract and retain volunteers with a passion for museums.

Community Engagement & Partnership working is equally important and by exploring the benefits of corporate volunteering and developing stronger community links with partnership groups with similar objectives and aspirations to ensure we provide an open, flexible and inclusive programme which considers the needs of the volunteers.

We have so much to offer and one of our aspirations is to raise the profile and build awareness of museum volunteering by working collaboratively with the teams across Canal & River Trust including Education, Environment and the Waterways.

Saying thank you is so important and we want to get it right so working with the team we are keen to introduce a scheme that ensures that the volunteer team stay motivated and feel valued.

I am proud to support the volunteer team, who in turn support me and my colleagues and together we are constantly looking to improve what we do and to encourage more people to get involved. Here's to the next 40 years and beyond!

*Emma Hermon*  
*Volunteer Co-ordinator, Museums*

## Ellesmere Port before the Museum

### Part 2 1966-1969

The first article provided background to my first visit to Ellesmere Port, at Whit 1966. In this second article I provide recollections of that visit, detail later visits, and consider the motorway threat.

My memories of this trip, from 29 May 1966, 50 years ago, remain strong. The somewhat bleak surroundings of the locks in Chester had been compounded by long delays in filling the Northgate Locks, apparently due to a mattress blocking one of the paddle chambers. Moorings below for the first night were opposite a landfill site and the Deva Mental Hospital (as it was then called); in the morning, Stanley Offley had arranged for the Mayor of Chester to go past the moored boats.

A very long day ensued. Weed was encountered north of the A5117 bridge, with boats grounding on rubbish at bridges, despite prior clearance work by BW. On arrival at Ellesmere Port, there were long queues, especially for newer NBCYC members like my father. The narrow locks were impassable: the intermediate pound was choked by floating rubbish, with one of the top gates of the top lock strapped open. The top gates of the upper wide lock did not mitre properly, and floating reeds had to be stuffed into the gap so that the lock could be emptied; the lower lock featured gates that dated, seemingly, from the 1880s, with unusual paddle gear (later removed and now in store). Below the locks, boats had to turn left under the arches of the large warehouse; the southern arch was impassable due to rubbish. The Lower Basin featured many abandoned boats, with Alma Bate prominent. At this time, the Mill Arm was still in use, so the larger Ship Lock was in reasonable order.

The need to queue provided a lot of time to look around a much-neglected site. There were rough paths between a heavy overgrowth of brambles. Buildings seemed to have been abandoned or were little-used. The toll house was not roofless (as I suggested in an earlier article) but was boarded up, with a very poor roof. It was clear that passage through the locks took place only as a tour de force, with MSC staff employed to operate the locks. Even to a boy at primary school, as I was, conditions clearly approached the impassable.

For some reason, the Harbourmaster insisted that boats should only leave to pass up the Ship Canal at five-minute intervals (later voyages proceeded in convoy); my father's boat was the second to last out, and as we looked back at the Port, a small dot in the distance showed that the last boat was leaving. Dr David Owen encountered the NBCYC boats on that weekend, and his account in *Water Rallies* confirms this irrational practice.

Over the following two years, several surviving accounts of pleasure use show that the Canal at Ellesmere Port was in poor order. The June 1967 *NorWester* reported that Peter Froud (later a founder of the Museum), Raymond Slack and Stanley Offley had taken members of Ellesmere Port Council along the canal by boat. The Whitby Locks had been deteriorating steadily, with considerable trouble over the last couple of months, but after IWA Branch action, "they are now in a better state of repair than they have been for a long time". This may account for the much easier passage when the Whit 1967 cruise by

NBCYC came up the locks on a reverse circuit of that taken in 1966. However, it was reported that after the Ship Canal Company had repaired the locks, they had been chained and padlocked, and permission to pass through to the Ship Canal had to be obtained from both the Dock Office at Ellesmere Port (at which the keys were kept) and that in Manchester. It is doubtful that they were much troubled. In July 1967 Messrs Slack and Offley passed through the Locks on their way to the National Rally at Leicester. They went down the Ship Canal to Eastham, and then along the Mersey to the Waterloo Dock entrance, to pass through the whole length of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal.

Robert Harris, author of *Canals and their Architecture*, travelled to Ellesmere Port, in the converted lifeboat *Greywell*, in summer 1967. Extensive weeding was recorded, especially north of Weavers Bridge 142. Frederick Doerflinger, author of *Slow Boat Through England*, came up the broad locks (the lock-keeper had to saw off padlocks, after dropping the keys in the canal!) and found duckweed all the way to Stoak. "Frankly, it looked as though no boat had passed this way for years", he commented.

In connection with the Chester Festival of the Arts, a Rally was held there on July 8-9th 1967, and it was hoped that boats would travel to Ellesmere Port, as "this section is distantly threatened". Fifty boats attended. J D Ward of Whitchurch cruised to Ellesmere Port just before the rally, in a 20-foot cabin cruiser. He found major problems with weed, plastic bags and floating rubbish. He found the worst section between the railway bridge and Bridge 147, where "I had to get out and bow-haul". He noted that a larger boat had made the passage a week earlier, and that four small boats were moored up by the Canal Tavern. How, if at all, these boats cruised through the weed was unclear. In December 1967, it was reported that the duckweed had been especially bad that year; as later. The wind swept floating weeds along the pound into the Ellesmere Port length.

Concern that lack of evidence of pleasure use had made it impossible to defend the closure of Runcorn Locks had led a North West IWA member, Anthony Swalwell, to launch "Swalwell's Scheme" in April 1966, under which he was to be notified by anyone boating through specified vulnerable lengths. This included Harecastle tunnel along with the locks at Chester and north to Ellesmere Port, as well as any journey accessing the Ship Canal. In August the locks at the Port were singled out for notification.

Ellesmere Port was soon directly threatened, by a motorway extension scheme. This lay in plans for a mid-Wirral motorway from the early 1960s, and from the construction of the Hooton Industrial Road, from the A41 to the A5032 at Ellesmere Port. The latter would be completed in 1968, and it was proposed to convert it to a motorway (M531) and extend it south to the A5117. Plans for the extension were submitted to the Ministry of Transport in August 1967. This promised to cut off the dockside Ellesmere Port from the rest of the town, demolishing the west side of Dock Street and the adjacent street. The rest of the line might have been routed over the west side of the canal had it not been for the then valuable property of the corrugated iron works and gas installations. Instead, it was proposed to cross the canal and then sweep east over the railway and a further canal crossing. At first bridges of 17ft 6in width were proposed, but the Ministry proved concerned to limit costs, and mooted crossings at ground level; in response, Cheshire County Council proposed to pipe the whole canal to the A5117.

The IWA response to this threat was led by Stanley Offley, who looked closely at the proposed line. Although the land for the motorway west of the canal was flat, it would be necessary to elevate it to cross at the intersection near the later Museum, to cross the railway, and then a large pipe, alongside the southernmost crossing. The bridge to carry the diverted Oil Sites Road could, admittedly, be more easily routed at ground level, but this was not part of the motorway itself. An Inquiry into the new motorway was held in April 1968, and Mr Offley submitted these points, much to the disquiet of the Ministry engineers; they did not attend a later site meeting. Much later, he suggested that he was bluffing, at least in part. Cheshire County Council, however, decided in October 1968 to recommend the maintenance of navigation, but through navigable “creeps” that permanently narrowed the canal. It proved impossible to prove that boats of 14 feet width had passed along the Canal since the 1940s, and would need access.

The Canal was also retained because of the provisions of the Transport bill, which became an Act in 1968. This classified the Canal as a Cruiseway, and it would have been difficult to amend this classification as the Bill was proceeding. Elsewhere, several M6 crossings at ground level were proceeding on the Lancaster canal, with one “creep” alone, at Kellet Lane below Tewitfield. This section had, however, been closed by a private Act of 1965.

At Whit 1968, the NBCYC/IWA circuit had taken place. On this occasion, some boats moored in the Upper Basin overnight; I recall Stanley Offley telling my parents about the case he had made against the motorway crossings. Marbeth II was moored under the canopy of the “Telford” warehouse; there were small pleasure boats moored around the basin and by the Canal Tavern, and a good deal of disturbance by local children, for whom the site was an informal playground. The locks again proved difficult; the barge locks were leaking so badly that at one point it was discussed whether to remove vast amounts of floating rubbish from the narrow locks and attempt to use these. Around now the grain traffic to the Mill Arm had ended; the Ship Lock gates were left open, with silting beginning, and boats passed through the lower Barge Lock. There was no “five minute” rule here, as the 1966 harbourmaster had gone, and boats soon passed out on to the Ship Canal.

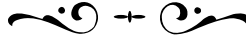
Another visit by Alan Jones and *William* confirmed that the closure of the Canal north of Chester was envisaged. On 3 June 1968 the boat descended Northgate Locks, and it was decided to dewater the middle lock to remove wire from the propeller. The local Section Inspector appeared, and told him that there were plans to close the canal from Northgate to Ellesmere Port. BW engineers later told me that this Inspector, who had been involved with the canal since 1919, had been quietly lowering water levels in anticipation of closure. Alan Jones’ party made it to Ellesmere Port, facing major problems either side of Stanlow Bridge 145, but that evening it was decided to return to moor at Stoak due to the canal’s condition.

The Transport Act now protected the status of the main navigable channel, as a cruiseway, but there were procedures to declare this a remainder waterway and thus enable closure. The Ship Canal Company chairman had suggested that pleasure boats passing through the locks, which were subject to a long lease, might be subject to charges.

The position was ambiguous, and it seemed that with the public right of navigation lost, the Ship Canal link might be cut, or at least left in mounting dereliction. Much more ominously, the Company was seeking to extend berthing facilities at Ellesmere Port, and the South Pier area was one possibility being considered in 1969.

(to be continued)

*Joseph Boughey*



## **Childhood memories of the River Weaver**

by **Bill Carter**, archive volunteer for more than 20 years and member of BMS

Last week whilst going through some old archive admin files I came across these notes made by Bill Carter describing his childhood memories of living close to the River Weaver. I've typed them up – for the most part they are Bill's words as he wrote them – I thought your readers would find them interesting so here they are.

“The village of Barnton is 50 feet above the Trent and Mersey canal which at this point is 50 feet above the River Weaver.

The half mile between Barnton Tunnel and Saltersford Tunnel has a wood on each side of the canal and the Weaver was too steep for farming and was left uncultivated, a third wood grew between the old river at Saltersford locks and the path over Saltersford tunnel. This was the area my childhood was spend in during the 1930s before I started school, when I walked down Leigh's Brow along the canal and down Jimmy's Bank with my aunty from next door to take her father, my grandfather, his work basket. He was the engine driver of the *America*. a Salt Union boat which took salt from Winsford to Birkhead and Liverpool and would have cycled the 7 miles to Winsford to board his boat. We waited at Saltersford Lock until he arrived to give him his basket which contained his food for the 3 or 4 days the trip would take. A Flatman's work basket was much larger than a Shiftman's work basket and must have been an awkward load to carry down Jimmy's Bank. If the weather was cold (I never went on wet days) the lock keepers would let us sit in their hut where they kept a good fire going.

The term 'flatman' for a man on a boat on the Weaver was a puzzle to me for many years. It was used locally up to the time that the last of the ICI boats went out of service in the 1960s although no Weaver flat had been used since before 1914.

As I grew older and went down to play in the woods, quite a lot of this time was spent watching the boats pass through the locks and trying to name them as soon as they came into sight. The black funnel of a Salt Union was easily distinguishable from the funnel of the ICI boats. A Salt Union boat could be distinguished before it came into sight by the black smoke most of them seemed to pour out.

*Opus, Decempedes, America, Weaverbelle, Madge, Millicent, Agnes, Crescent, Frances Poole* are just a few of the names of the Salt Union and ICI boats of those days but to me the grandest of all these boats was *Herald of Peace*.



After World War II, Salt Union boats disappeared from the river and ICI gradually replaced its fleet with new boats – *James Jackson Grundy*, *Cuddington*, *Wincham*, *Weaverham*, *Barnton* and others, all except *James Jackson Grundy* named after villages near to their Winnington and Wallerscote works. All these boats had a large mast and derrick to help load and unload themselves operated by a small winch on the bow just forward of the mast. To my mind they appeared much better proportioned than the few remaining boats do with their little toothpick like masts.

Coasters would also come up to ICI to pick up loads of caustic soda and soda ash. The only regular one pre-war was the *Island Magee*. When this went out of service it was succeeded by *Jolly Days* until this sank off the Scottish coast.

Petrol was another cargo regularly taken up the Weaver to Northwich by two small tankers *Castlegate* and *Queensgate*. We always expected one of them to sink as they moved slowly up the river with a freeboard of about one inch.

The only other cargo carrying boats on the Weaver were narrowboats with motor boats and butty or horse drawn.

Horse-drawn boats on the Weaver needed long tow ropes, probably 60 to 70 yards because of the difficulty of leaving Saltersford when going up river as the sluice for flood control was parallel to the locks and on the towpath side.

*Firefly* and *Waterfly* were two tugs but in my mind I can never recall them towing, only dashing madly up and down the river breaking whatever speed limit there was with wash behind them rising above the piling at the edges of the river and washing sand off the bank on the Weaverham side.

The Navy tug *Pioneer* was used as a travelling wages office once a week as it took wages to all the lock and bridge keepers on the Weaver. She was replaced at some stage by the *France-Hayhurst* named after Colonel France-Hayhurst, chairman of the Weaver Navigation Trust. As a small child I remember chanting '*Pioneer* couldn't steer 'cos he had a pint of beer!' Whether this referred to some accident she was involved in due to drunkenness of a crew member I do not know.

The other Navy boats that I remember are the blacksmith's boat, on which my great uncle worked, the divers' boat, great excitement watching him don his thick suit and heavy boots and brass helmet and then clumsily climb down the ladder to disappear into the murky water leaving a trail of bubbles while his mates on the boat slowly turned the air pump and tended his rope and lastly, the bucket dredger with its endless line of buckets emerging from the water, rising to the peak turning over and dropping their loads into the holds of one of the 3 mud hoppers, *Shark*, *Whale* or *Grampus* which when full would take their load up river to one of the flashes where it would help to fill the hole left by subsidence due to brine pumping.

Occasionally old, worn out wooden boats would be taken up river, also to be dumped in the flashes. At least one of these sank prematurely on its last journey and temporarily blocked the river just below Hunt's Lock, this occurred the year I started Grammar School and we could see the work being done to raise it as we crossed Hunt's Lock on our way to and from school.

There was no public footpath over Saltersford Lock and the keepers would not allow

any child to cross the gates to the island between little and big lock. They would, however allow you to help them turn the handles on the tow path side that raised or lowered the paddles or opened the lock gates.

Both little and big lock had three pairs of gates and each gate had its paddle gear and gate operating gear. Both lock gates were operated manually but now there is hardly any traffic on the Weaver the locks are operated electrically.

All the lock keepers at Saltersford lived in the six lock houses as did my uncle who was the toll clerk. At this time these houses had not gas, electricity or main sewerage, just one cold water tap per house.

The houses were sited between the old and new rivers and had large well- kept gardens. The front gardens were always lawns and flowers, while the back garden which extended to the old river was mainly vegetables and fruit. This must have been a boon for their wives, lightening their shopping, which needed carrying home, few deliveries apart from milk and post being made to Saltersford. Coal was delivered by barge once a quarter. Between the two rows of houses was the ruins of what I was told was a brick kiln and near this the 'keepers had a well- tended bowling green for their use and any friends.

Below Saltersford locks the old river joined the main stream and the towpath was carried over it by an arched wooded bridge built on three piers and painted white. White-bridge was the place where most of the locals went swimming in the summer.

Any walks along the canal were interesting but best sight of all was seeing the tug emerge from the tunnel, preceded by clouds of smoke. This tug ran to a timetable through Barnton and Saltersford Tunnels and it was coal fired with a crew of two, steerer and engineer, horizontally mounted wheels, fore and aft, guided it through the tunnel, a necessity because of the mass of smoke it generated the steerer must have been blind during its passage. How the narrow boat steerers managed I do not know, but the paintwork needed a wash down after going through the tunnels. The tugmen were black as sweeps, spending large times in thick smoke and yet the only two I knew personally lived into their late 60s.

Away from the tunnels out in the country it was interesting watching horse drawn boats meeting, boats keeping to the right of the canal, horses to the left of the towpath and the horse near the hedge slowing to let its rope dip into the canal until the other boat and horse had passed over the top when it could resume to normal pace. Approaching bridge holes the steerer would crack his whip to warn boats approaching in the opposite direction. We were told that boatmen also used their whips to catch rabbits and hens on the banks and ducks on the water, the truth of this I do not know.

At the far end of Saltersford tunnel was a tumble-down deserted one room brick building, the leggers' hut, unused since the introduction of the tug. Near the other end of Saltersford tunnel a stream was diverted to fill a large open topped wooden tank where the tug refilled its boiler when necessary and where occasionally a narrow boat would diverge from the usual channel and without stopping the steerer dip his can to refill with fresh water. Across the canal from this tank and on the tow path side was a concrete horse trough built into the bank and kept full by natural seepage. This was used by most of the horses which were being led over the tunnels. Of these three items, the only one left is the horse trough and is much overgrown and almost full of silt.

During the war it was easy to tell when a convoy had arrived in the Mersey by the increased number of boats queuing to get into Saltersford tunnel and transport the urgently needed cargoes to the heart of England.

About two miles beyond Saltersford tunnel at Taylor's Bridge was a lengthman's house. No sign of it now remains. His job was to keep the hedge on the tow path cattle proof and trimmed back so that the towpath was wide enough for two horses to pass and make any minor repairs to the towpath and bank in his length. Major repairs were carried out from work boats.

In the winter we hoped for a heavy frost to freeze up the canal so that we could slide across from bank to bank. This only happened once in 1940 but we did not have long to enjoy it before the sally ice boat came along to clear a route for the narrow boats. This was an exciting occasion, three or four horses trotting on the towpath and six men rocking the boat violently from side to side, the steerer attempting to keep the boat in the centre of the canal as it crashed into, onto and through the ice which split into floes, some of which were washed on the towpath. If the iceboat came to a halt it was hauled back from the ice and then run at the ice again.

My most abiding memory of the Weaver is the flood of 1946. From our vantage point on Jimmy's Bank it was a frightening sight. As the river swept around the bend above Saltersford it washed out the lower part of Jimmy's Bank, the lock gates were under water and the Keeper's house was flooded almost to window level on the ground floor. The roar of the water particularly through the sluice with gate fully lifted, was terrible. The people in the first house, which took full force of the water spent a terrifying time until the flood went down. Whitebridge also disappeared in this flood, curtailing any walks down river until the new bridge was erected.

Whenever I visit Barnton I try to make time to walk down to the canal and Saltersford. The canal has not changed much except there are no working boats but after the flood a narrow road was built and it is now possible to drive a car to Saltersford and while coasters still go to ICI I have not seen any [narrowboats] moving on the river."

Bill remained a keen walker until he died and most weeks would meet up with Lyn Doylerush (a previous Archivist at the museum) when their walks would more often than not include a canal towpath. Bill would often come out with stories during the time I knew him but was always dismissive of their value and so I was pleased to find that he had recorded them after all.

*Linda Barley  
Archivist*

## FLOATS not Flats

Floats were wide boats which had decked over holds and were used for bulky deck cargoes to like timber (which some of them were registered to carry), coal, iron sheets, building materials etc.

As mentioned in RePort No 211 one of the many boats tied up at Ellesmere Port docks on census night in 1911, was the float *Blossom*.



The float *Blossom*, moored in the Victoria arm at Ellesmere Port.  
Image D4604, Waterways Archive,  
Graham Berlyn.

The Shropshire Union Railway & Canal Company (SUR&CCo) had a number of these vessels dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The majority were named after trees – *Cedar*, *Maple*, *Oak*, *Palm*, *Willow*, *Ash*, *Teak*, *Spruce*, *Poplar* etc. They were used in the cross-river trade between Ellesmere Port and Liverpool; most were registered for carrying timber. They also carried materials around the docks including coal to the pump houses from the coal tip on the north quay of the Manchester Ship Canal. Floats also used to transport material between the Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Co's canalside works at Ellesmere Port and John Summers steel works at Shotton.

The building, fates and mishaps of a number of these vessels are recorded in the SUR&CCo minutes.

There were 2 floats named *Cedar*. The first, registered No17 in the Chester Boat Register in 1879 when registration became compulsory. In 1914 this vessel was condemned as being past repair and was sold after all serviceable ironwork had been removed. (SU minute 22293) The second *Cedar* was registered at Chester No 694 in May 1912 for carrying timber like its predecessor.

When the SUR&CCo disposed of its fleet of boats after it ceased carrying in 1921, the Manchester Ship Canal Company purchased *Cedar*, along with *Blossom* and *Teak* for use in the work of repairing the slopes of the Ship Canal. In the offer letter, the original asking price of £600 was rejected as the *Cedar* required '*Some money spending on her before she can be put to work*'. She was bought for £273 6s 8d; the following year the 'essential' repairs costing only £12 17s 0d. From then onwards, she was regularly maintained with repairs costing from £22 to £138 every other year.

*Cedar* continued to work for the Bridgewater Department of the Manchester Ship Canal as a maintenance float, coming out of service in 1948. It was acquired by the Museum in 1979 from Mr Pilkington of Frodsham. Despite a considerable amount of work being carried out whilst *Cedar* was on the bank next to the approach road to the museum, she sank after being launched in 1981. *Cedar*, the last remaining SU float, remains sunk in the lower basin, visible only when the water level is at its lowest.



*Cedar*, being worked on near the entrance to the Museum in 1980.



*Cedar*, in the Museum's Upper Basin

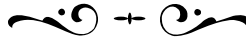
Two of the SU floats were bought by the Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Company (WCICo) in 1925 and became the *Elleshill* (possibly built in 1912) and *Ellesmoor* (1909) By then they were owned by London Midland & Scottish Railway Company. I am still trying to find out which of the SU floats these were. They were sold to J.H. & W.S. Taylor of Chester in September 1926.



WCICo float *Ellesmoor* being unloaded in the Billet Arm

*Ellesmanor* and *Ellesmarsh* were the last of the floats built at the former SU boat-yard at Chester in 1930. J H Taylor & Sons, who had operated the yard since 1921, built these fine wooden vessels for the WCICo., They too were sold to the Manchester Ship Canal Company in 1937 and were both disposed of by sinking in the canal arms and basins in the old line of locks at Runcorn in 1950.

Research continues. Any further information on these craft would be most welcome.  
*Cath Turpin.*



## A Surprise in Siberia

Some two years ago I gave a Friday evening talk to BMS about a 19th century British sea captain, Joseph Wiggins, who made many attempts to pioneer an all-water trading route through the Arctic Ocean and up the huge River Yenisei deep into the heart of Siberia. His first two voyages in 1874 and 1875 were unsuccessful, but in 1876 he sailed from Sunderland in a ship called the *Thames* – the first ever sea-going cargo vessel to penetrate the Arctic Ocean and the River Yenisei.

Those BMS members who (a) were at my talk, (b) were paying attention, and (c) have absurdly long memories, may recall that the 1876 voyage was full of adventure and calamity. After over-wintering in a desolate location exactly on the Arctic Circle, in summer 1877 he began the return voyage. By this time however, the *Thames's* rudder had been badly damaged by floating ice as the river thawed, and it was not long before she

In 1876 Captain Wiggins's ship *Thames* was described as a "screw schooner". Today I reckon a salesman would describe her as a "fuel efficient hybrid" – dual fuel wind and coal. Through the Arctic and the rivers, she had to use sail as much as possible to preserve coal for the return voyage – there were no bunkering ports in the Siberian Arctic at that time. (Any small river steamers had wood-burning boilers with voracious appetites, and had to anchor in the channel every few miles and laboriously use a rowing boat to re-stock from log-piles on the bank.)

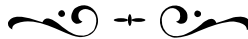


was stranded on a mid-river sandbank (the river being three miles wide at this point) near the present day town of Igarka. This was a desolate location in 1877 (Igarka being a Soviet creation of the 1920s). Wiggins abandoned the ship, but managed to sell the wreck in situ for the salvage of its valuable boilers – steam technology was almost non-existent in remote Siberia at that time.

And now for the surprise: 139 years later, the *Thames* has been found. In July an expedition from the impressive-sounding Siberian State Aerospace University located and identified the wreck some 50 miles south of Turukhansk. This is about 200 miles south of Igarka, and supports the rumour that in 1878 the Russians tried to tow the *Thames* some 900 miles upriver to Yeniseisk for dismantling, but were forced to abandon the attempt. The hull is still embedded in the sand and silt, but apparently there are hopes of rescuing it.

The discovery has aroused great excitement in Siberia, recalling that over 100 years ago after several more voyages Wiggins became a hero there and was honoured by Tsar Alexander III, while remaining virtually unknown in Britain.

*Ken Catford*



## Replacement of the lock gates at Ellesmere Port

**I**t has been impossible to ignore the lock works going on at the Museum recently – so what has been happening?

Over the last few weeks, the bottom gates of the top wide lock have been replaced with traditional oak ones in place of the steel gates which have been in place for some years. These large gates have been constructed at the specialist facility at Stanley Ferry. (To find out more about the work done by these skilled carpenters, search: building lock gates/Canal and River Trust)

The fantastic bit of machinery – the spider crane – that was suspended on its legs across the lock has seen its first use in this area. Everyone was impressed – how did it get there? Have a look at the photos!

Apart from removing the old lock gates and installing the new ones, the spider crane has had another particular benefit. Some of you may have noticed that the old lock gates from the previous gate replacement on the lower wide lock have been removed. The spider crane was able to lift the old gates that had stood in the lock for many years onto the floating pontoon so that now all the old gates have been removed from the site. *George* will be able to return through the wide locks on its return from its first outreach programme at the end of the season.

This work was taking place during July and CRT held a 'Locks Open Weekend' which supplemented the Museum's 40th Anniversary event on the 2nd & 3rd. We (visitors, staff and volunteers) were able to use the access steps to go down into the base of the wide lock – who couldn't be impressed by the original brickwork dating from 1795 when

the wide locks were first built? Radio Merseyside even did a live broadcast with interviews from down there. What a pity there were not cameras!

This work went well and work started ahead of schedule to replace the top gates of the top narrow lock. These gates, which were leaking badly, have also been replaced with traditional oak ones. The new gates for the narrow locks were constructed at Bradley workshops in the west midlands.

Whilst this was all happening, the canal navigation used the wide locks to pass traffic up and down the locks. One reason that we are seeing this work being done during the summer season is that we have the parallel sets of locks. This means CRT staff have been able to schedule this without a navigation closure which is useful to them and to boaters and our moorers.

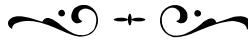
Graham Boxer had been particularly pressing for this to be included in the works and some detailed thought and planning by the waterways staff has managed to achieve that. Thanks!

Once again it's good for the Museum to be within CRT with its ability to make longer term investments not only into the canal 'track' but into its facilities as we have been seeing on site with the dealing of much building and site maintenance backlog.

*Cath Turpin*



The spider crane (top) and the gates sitting on the CRT pontoon (below)



## The Museum's lock flight – why do they flood?

The recent works on the locks have caused great interest amongst all of us as well as our visitors. Everyone has seen that with the wide locks empty great care has to be taken not to flood the lock areas on the narrow flight. However, this is not just a problem when there are works going on – it's been happening for a long, long time.

Thus one of the questions I've been asked many times by some of you and visitors is – why is this? What's going on? Did the original canal engineers make a mistake?



In simple terms nearly all locks have a means of letting excess water pass by them and into the lower level – a by-wash weir. Originally here at the Ellesmere Port there was a by-wash weir in the corner of the Upper Basin by the crane on Grosvenor Wharf. There is a weir in the pound between the two wide locks – where our dry dock is. However, this weir was only designed to take the water from the top wide lock, built in 1795. Later on when the line of narrow locks was put in around 1845, when the docks expanded, the excess water from the narrow locks flowed through the cross paddle which controls the tunnel between the wide and narrow pounds.

All this worked well and with professional boaters and dock workers everyone knew what to do.

Move on to the early days of the Museum and the major regeneration works in the 1980s. British Waterways as part of these works decided to move the weir in the Upper Basin to a new one alongside where Ilkeston is normally moored, and discharging into the wide lock pound, and thence over the existing weir into the Lower Basin.

All well and good, you think. And so did everyone for a long while. However, we kept finding that the flight would get flooded, over the grass and the lock sides. All a bit of fun and boaters getting wet feet. But no – there were serious consequences. Because of this flooding, water was repeatedly running over the quayside on the left of the lower wide lock and down into the basin. This is bad because it washes away the earth below it and behind the walls – eventually after 20 years and about 10 years ago the lower wing wall on the exit into the Lower Basin COLLAPSED.

Even so it was only in the last couple of years, particularly driven by our boat demonstration training and trying to figure out what was happening and why canal engineers are nearly always right that I gradually figured out what was going on.

In my opinion and simply put – the weir between the locks was not designed to have the capacity to take the water from operating locks AND the excess water continually flowing along the Wirral branch from Chester. This extra water flowing into the pound essentially raised the level by 2-4 inches, thus reducing the free board on the pound and the lock sides

What to do about it – well that's subject to on-going discussions, but basically to either lower the weir, lower the gate tops or re-instate the original weir. These might sound simple but costs, heritage / conservation and lots of tricky technical issues come into play before a good solution can be agreed.

The floods of last winter and other pressing repairs to the canal infrastructure has meant that the replacement of the wide lock wing wall collapsed area is still to be done. We are still awaiting details of when this is to be re-scheduled. However, investigations and planning have been going on about these works and this may lead to some limited re-opening of the wide lock flight.

I can guarantee that everyone has a solution! I've heard most of them ... if you've got a good idea – let me know.

*Mike Turpin*

### Have you joined the Boat Museum Society 200 Club yet?

Members of the club ensure a significant and steady income for boat restoration projects. Each month 50% of total money subscribed is paid out in prize money and 50% goes into boat restoration.. By joining the **200 Club**, members who live too far away from the Museum to be able to come and help, or those who have other commitments, have the opportunity to make a regular contribution to the Society.

You can buy as many numbers as you like at £1 each, the only proviso being that you are a member of the Society. The more numbers that go into the draw each month, the bigger the prizes.

The **200 Club** draw is usually made at the monthly Society meetings. You can join at a meeting, or by completing the form below and sending it with your membership fee to Lynn Potts, whose address is below.

#### Winners

- June** Graham & Beryl Hefford(36), Norman Lye(73), Brenda Wilson(34)
- July** Ruth Foster(76), Nick Dilley(77), Mike Turpin(22)
- August** Cynthia Green(49), Judy Jones(30), Barbara Kay(65)

Many thanks to those who have so generously donated their winnings back to the Society, this is much appreciated.

### Application form - The Boat Museum Society 200 Club



Name: .....

Address: .....

Post Code: ..... Telephone: .....

I apply for membership of the Boat Museum Society 200 Club and agree to pay the sum of £1.00 per month per number. Subscriptions are payable in advance for the months up to and including June or December. I am over 18 years of age and a paid-up member of the Boat Museum Society.

Signed:..... Date: .....

Please send the completed form with your payment to:  
**Lynn Potts, 58 Frankby Road, West Kirby, Wirral. CH48 6EF**  
 Cheques should be made payable to the 'Boat Museum Society'

## Ben & Holly

As many of you will already be aware, the museum hosted a "Meet Ben & Holly" event, linked to the Entertainment One TV show "Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom". This was a pilot event which will hopefully lead to a corporate partnership with Entertainment One. Over the course of the day we registered 650 visitors, a really good number for a September Sunday! As well as the Ben & Holly meet and greets (*photo p18*), we also ran themed boat rides, pony rides, lock demonstrations, jousting and a giant sandpit play area. I have to say a huge thankyou to all the staff and volunteers who helped the event to run smoothly and who contributed to so many families having a fantastic experience. There were many positive comments from visitors throughout the day, here are just a few:

*"The café staff were so friendly and welcoming. I sat in a corner to breastfeed and a lady came over with a glass of water for me. Very considerate."*

*"We absolutely loved the boat ride. Bill was a wonderful storyteller!"*

After the excitement of the opening in June, the new Museum with displays in the ground floor of the Tollhouse was open regularly at weekends during the long hot summer of 1976.

photo: Chris Griffiths





**Graham Boxer** (CRT Head of Museums), **Jim McKeown** (NWM Duty Manager), **Richard Parry** (CRT Chief Executive), **Harry Arnold** MBE (BMS founder member), **Tony Hirst** OBE (former Boat Museum Director), **Di Skilbeck** MBE (BMS President) mark the 40th anniversary of the Museum.

photo: **Chris Bacon**