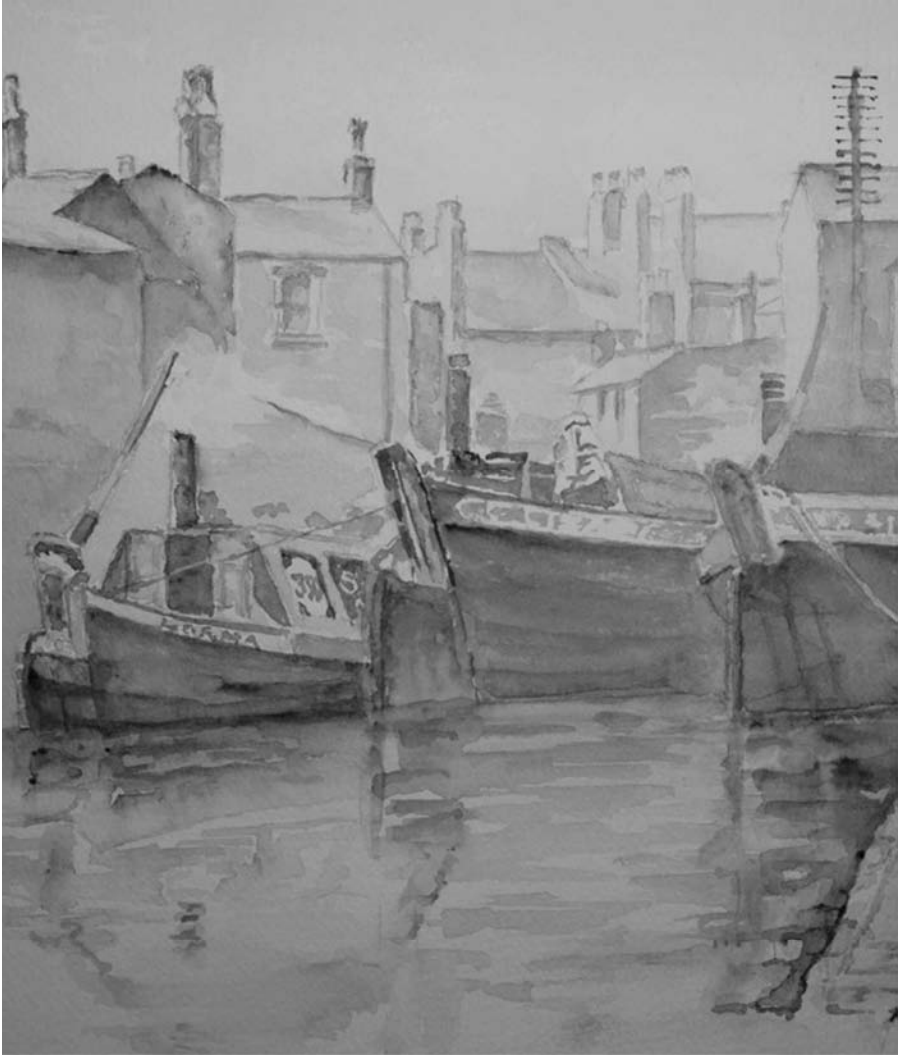


THE LEGGER



THE JOURNAL OF THE DUDLEY CANAL TRUST

Winter 2009

No. 215

DUDLEY CANAL TRUST

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Editorial

Not too long ago I was lucky enough to visit the legendary Gipsies Tent, Steppingstone St. Dudley. I knew that the early meetings of The Dudley Tunnel Preservation Society, the forerunner of Dudley Canal Trust, had been held there and had been told that there were some ancient boating magazines that I could have. In one of them, 'Navigation' the magazine of The Inland Waterways Association Midlands Branch, December 1962, Vol.12. No.30. I happened on an article entitled "Under The Castle" written by Vic Smallshire. It described Vic's early explorations in the Dudley Tunnel. On reading it, I thought that it was important, but left many questions unanswered, I contacted Vic and very soon received back a detailed personal history of the Dudley Canal Trust. Vic currently is unwell, we wish him a speedy return to health, so I have published his response in lieu of his Chairman's Notes. The original article will soon be available on our website www.dudleytunnel.co.uk

Our tripping company is bidding for funding, with a view to building a Learning and Access Hub and Canal Resource Centre at the Towpath in Tipton. This exciting new project will enhance the visitor experience, with better access and provide some much needed improved facilities for the public and staff that the current wooden huts lack. An artists impression of the proposed development adorns the back cover.

The committee extends a warm welcome to our new member, Chris Round, one of the Towpath skippers, I am sure he will bring new insights, ideas and a different perspective to our meetings.

I am still looking for local artists and or local artwork to feature on the cover of The Legger.

Gavin Lawson
Editor

Comments, Complaints, Letters, Articles and Pictures are welcome.
legger@live.co.uk

Deadline for the next edition Tuesday 9th February 2010.

Chairman's (Historical) Notes

This is my personal account of the momentous events of over 40 years ago that sprang from a mis-spent youth in Dudley .

In 1964, at the age of 19, I was one of the founding members of the Dudley Canal Trust, a group of like minded people, distressed at the creeping destruction of our canal system, who were instrumental in stopping the dark forces of destruction in their tracks at Dudley. The bringing together of these founding members was itself the product of the magic that filled the air in the 60s.

As a lad growing up in the Black Country, I was very much aware of the heavy industry that surrounded me and that it was impossible to travel any distance without crossing a canal bridge. As I grew older I began to explore the little bits of canal visible from the bridges and, to my surprise and delight, I found that they all joined up. I had discovered a secret network of canals that served not only the Black Country but perhaps beyond. The difficulty was finding out more. At that time there were few books on canals. They were not yet the stuff of literature.

School was little use. Our history master was of the opinion that ancient Egypt had a complete monopoly on all things historical. It was simply inconceivable that anything of any historical significance had happened in our own back yard. Our geography master was better informed, he actually knew about canals, and railways, but wasn't allowed to teach about them because it wasn't in the curriculum. The wheat crops of the Canadian Prairies took precedence. It seemed that the best way forward was to find out what I could for myself.

I was fortunate in my choice of parents. My father was a cabinet maker . I persuaded him that boat building could not be far removed from furniture making. He rose to the challenge and built two. First a small rowing boat in which school friends and I explored as far afield as Tipton and after I had saved up for a small outboard motor even as far as Wolverhampton. We kept our boat at a friendly canal side coal yard on the Bradley Arm. Then we got ambitious and built a cabin cruiser in which I am proud to say I navigated most of the canal & river system in

an age when it was still an adventure to do so. The boat was completed in 1962 when I was 17 but not quite in time to attend a rally of boats organised by the Inland Waterways Association and the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal Society at Stourbridge. This rally was held in the face of fierce opposition from the British Transport Commission, who were, at that time, the "custodians" of our canal system and intent on getting rid of it as quickly as possible. Having seen its last commercial traffic in the 50s the branch into Stourbridge was choked with silt and debris. The BTC declined to dredge the canal for the rally, resulting in the IWA making their own arrangements in the form of a dragline that appeared on the towpath at Wordsley.

It is one of my greatest regrets that I was not present when an official from the BTC who turned up to stop the dredging got a soaking from this dragline driven by David Hutchings, the Chairman of the IWA Midlands branch. This single act probably saved our canal system. In the aftermath of this incident both parties retired to adjacent telephone boxes to consult their legal advisers and decide who was going to sue whom. The moist man from the BTC was advised to back off by his masters, because, if the dispute came to court, they would lose, because they had failed to maintain the canal to the standard required by the Canal Act, which also made provision for the users to maintain it themselves, if the owners failed to do so. Which is what they were doing!

By the time our new boat was finished, I was employed as an apprentice mining surveyor at Baggeridge Colliery. As one of my first outings I planned to take my mining colleagues on a busmans holiday from Tipton, through Dudley Tunnel, down Parkhead Locks and return through Netherton Tunnel.

Apart from scenes reminiscent of The African Queen as we struggled along the canal, all went well on our trip through Dudley Tunnel until we reached Parkhead Locks, where to our dismay we found that the paddle gear had been smashed and balance beams sawn off by the BTC as part of their grand plan to prevent boats reaching the Stourbridge rally.

We had no choice but to return through Dudley Tunnel, a journey that would have been uneventful but for the finding of a message in a bottle

left in a hole in the brickwork by a group of people, who had "borrowed" a boat for a trip through the tunnel about a year earlier. The message asked the finder to get in touch. On our return to the office on Monday morning a letter was written on National Coal Board notepaper to the address in Tipton. A few days later we were all surprised when the recipient phoned our office. The outcome was a meeting with Cliff Sherwood and a group of his friends, who spent their weekends exploring the Dudley limestone mines. Having made a whole host of new friends, we made a point of navigating through Dudley Tunnel on my boat most weekends. Our motivation was, knowing that there were people in high places who didn't want us to. We knew that it was only a matter of time before some way would be found of stopping us, but in the meantime being a thorn in the side of officialdom was great fun and worth doing for its own sake.

And so it came to pass that we turned up one Sunday morning to find the tunnel portal blocked by a huge timber beam, spiked into the ground at both ends. We retreated to consider our strategy, which was to remove the obstruction come what may. I wrote to the IWA head office in London explaining what we had found. I asked which law we were going to break when we removed the obstruction and how long we were going to be locked up for. The reply was surprising. It said that The Minister of Transport, Ernest Marples, was on record in Hansard as saying that, although canals would be abandoned, there would be nothing to prevent people using them at their own risk. The removal of this obstruction would therefore be entirely in accordance with the spirit of minister's statement. Accordingly, with great ceremony and the application of pulley blocks, wedges and sledge hammers, the obstruction was removed the following Sunday morning, as was the one that prevented us from getting out of the other end of the tunnel at the end of our celebratory cruise.

A notice stating that Dudley Tunnel was closed somehow got lost in the confusion. A replacement notice stating "Dudley Tunnel. Closed by the government on behalf of the people. Reopened by the people on behalf of themselves." was planned but never made. Perhaps there is still time.



Photos from 1962 the originals have been lost, apologies for the poor quality - Ed

At this point David Hutchings played a pivotal role. We met a few days later at a meeting of the Staffs & Works Canal Society in Wolverhampton. He was addressing the meeting on the progress on the restoration of the Stratford upon Avon Canal of which he was in charge. During the interval he came over to see me. Anyone else would have asked if I could perhaps write a few words on our adventures at Dudley for the IWA journal "Navigation". David simply announced that he had reserved eight pages, expected me to fill them and would like the text next week. I had never written anything for publication in my life but David was a man to whom no one had ever successfully said "no", as people in very high places were to find out later in his career. The article was duly written, published and the floodgates opened. Letters of support poured in from all over the country. From these, several people living locally joined our happy band and we all became, and still are, firm friends. One of these letters came from someone who was attempting to navigate Parkhead Locks at the same time as a lorry load of workmen turned up to demolish them. As a result of this encounter we know beyond all doubt "who done it". The lorry had the words "British Transport Waterways" painted on the side.

It has to be said that David Hutchings referred to our ill organised campaign to save Dudley Tunnel as "madness in the pursuit of sanity". The next step was to satisfy the demand for trips through the now famous tunnel. We started with boats borrowed from a Tipton coal merchant. Later we were given a succession of boats from a variety of sources, all in an advanced state of decay.

We persisted in navigating Dudley Tunnel and ran trips for anyone who wanted one on Sunday mornings. One such trip was organised for the Workers Educational Association by Dr John Fletcher who strained our modest resources when he advertised his trip as positively the last chance to see Dudley Tunnel and four hundred people turned up.

Dr Fletcher admired what we were doing. We were, after all, the only people in the Black Country doing anything about preserving our industrial heritage. The fact that we were doing it in a totally haphazard way appalled him. He pointed out that, if we were going to be taken

seriously we were going to have to do some very dull things like form a committee, write a constitution, print some headed notepaper and start writing letters to people in high places. He didn't mention playing with boats at all! We reluctantly took his advice. After all, we were only in our teens and he was very old. He was nearly thirty and had been to university, whatever that was!

In the formative years of the Trust John Fletcher served as our Chairman, being the only one of us who had any idea how to run a committee meeting. During this time several things happened. Industrialists, who were throwing out steam engines and other interesting machines from their factories, were constantly approaching us to see if we could find a good home for them. We had opened negotiations with Dudley Council seeking their support for restoring the Dudley Canal and Tunnel. We took the opportunity at our meetings with The Council to acquaint them with our fears for our entire industrial heritage of the area, not just the canal system.

John Fletcher, also concerned at the loss of our industrial heritage, tried to turn the Dudley Canal Trust into something bigger to address the wider threat that faced the history of the Black Country. The Dudley Canal Trust decided that it would not take on the job of campaigning for the Black Country as a whole, while it still had the pressing problem of restoring the Dudley Canal to deal with. At this point, John Fletcher left the Trust to fulfil his dream of forming the Black Country Society. The Dudley Canal Trust had been a stepping stone in his great plan but without his influence we may never have got ourselves organised.

At a public meeting held in Dudley Town Hall on 10th February 1970 to establish support for a proposed Black Country Museum, the Dudley Canal Trust were credited with first bringing the idea to Dudley Council although by then public support for the idea was substantial and growing.

Alex Wilson, the borough librarian, had been keen on setting up an industrial museum for Dudley before we appeared on the scene, and our ideas were taken up enthusiastically by his successor John Hoyle. At about this time Basil Poole, mining consultant of Dudley, brought his

considerable influence to bear to promote the idea of a Black Country Museum. Basil later became president of the Dudley Canal Trust and chairman of the Friends of the Black Country Museum.

In the early days, various sites for the proposed museum were considered. My professional training ground, the recently closed Baggeridge Colliery was one, the grounds of Himley Hall was another. We in the Dudley Canal Trust felt that the site of a soon to be closed sewage works on the side of the Dudley Canal at Tipton was just the place. Basil Poole persuaded a friendly mining contractor to dredge the canal branches into this unpromising site, whereupon all agreed that this was just what they were looking for.

In the forty years that have elapsed since those humble beginnings, the Dudley Canal Trust, The Black Country Society and the Black Country Living Museum with its own band of supporters, The Friends of the Black Country Museum, have all developed into the successful organisations that they are today, each covering its own speciality with its own expertise with each complementing the others.

Each of these organisations have had their successes and have made a difference to the Black Country that we have today. It could be argued that The Dudley Canal Trust influence has spread nationwide. Had it not been for the battles fought and won at Dudley in establishing that our canal system had a future, the 2500 mile canal network that we enjoy today would almost certainly not have survived. The Dudley Canal was the first to be abandoned by Act of Parliament and then restored by volunteers.

After 9 years continuous volunteer work after the formation of the Trust, the Dudley Tunnel and Parkhead Locks were reopened to navigation on Easter Saturday 1973. Nine years earlier in 1964, at the opening of the restored Stratford Canal, David Hutchings spoke of this great achievement as "pushing the steam roller of bureaucracy backwards". In 1973 at the opening of the restored Dudley Canal, I spoke of turning the steam roller of bureaucracy around until it was going in our direction. But it had been such a long process that the driver hadn't noticed that he was going the same way as us.

This subtle change of tactics of dragging officialdom with us rather than colliding head on has served us well.

Since then the Trust has set up its own trip operating company, currently carrying 80,000 passengers a year into Dudley Tunnel and the limestone mines that we opened in the 1980s.

We have turned a derelict stinking ditch into the busiest canal in the country and turned the abandoned limestone mines that were universally regarded as a liability, into one of the Black Country's greatest assets.

It is true that there must have been something in the air, or perhaps the water, in the 60's. Almost the entire preservation movement, whether for canals, railways or anything else can be traced back to the heady, even magical, days of the 60's when the girls wore mini skirts, we were young enough to appreciate them, and there were causes worth fighting for with a real prospect of winning.

Although we didn't know it at the time, it is now generally accepted that the 60s was when the government first lost the plot, not to mention the trust of an increasingly sceptical proletariat.

Since then successive governments from both ends of the political spectrum have had to tread carefully in dealing with a disillusioned and vocal electorate and in extreme cases even listen to what they have to say. Fortunately my Black Country education prepared me well for such a situation. The most powerful, and painful, lesson I learned at school was that those in power do not necessarily have the foggiest idea what they are talking about. This axiom has stood me in good stead through - out my adult life and has instilled in me a healthy contempt for authority in any of its uniforms.

The dark forces of destruction will always try to tell you that they are right because they are powerful. My experience is that the more powerful the organisation, the more likely it is to be wrong. The problem is, that those who would destroy our heritage have only to succeed once. Those of us who would preserve it have to fight off every threat and win every time. Truly, there is no rest for the wicked, not even the very wicked.

Vic Smallshire

Membership Matters

A big thank you to so many new members this quarter it is great to see membership applications still coming in despite the current financial difficulties every one is experiencing. Welcome to the new members.

Mr & Mrs Forster	Cheshire
Mr M Wright	Wednesfield
Mr K Manning	Brinklow
Mr S Stephens	Dudley
Mr A Kinnear	Walsall
Ms D Porter	Walsall
Mr W Cole	Sutton Coldfield
Mrs E Tromans	Tipton
Dr & Mrs Johnson	Plymouth
Mr M Braine	Weston, Staffs
Mr & Mrs Trevis-Smith & family	Studley
Mr & Mrs Perks	Stourbridge
Mr J Embling	Brighton
Miss C Alison	Tipton
Mr & Mrs Bryan	Stourton

It would be lovely to meet anyone who could attend our social evenings if you can make it, I know some members live quite a distance away, if you can't your membership is as always very important to us.

I would like to thank Alan Hazeldine for introducing me in the last issue of The Ledger and I would like to, on behalf of The Trust, give Alan a massive thank you for all the hard work he has put into being Membership Secretary in the past years.

If anyone would like to contact me for any membership enquiries, suggestions etc please e-mail me. heidi_yardley_422@hotmail.com

Heidi Yardley

Social Events

Dudley Canal Trust. Social meeting dates 2009 / 2010.

All meetings are held at Blowers Green Pumphouse, Peartree Lane, Dudley DY2 0XP and start at 7:30 p.m.

Many thanks to John Smith of Dudley Caving Club who entertained us in October with a slide presentation of visits to cave systems, mines and quarries that he has made over the years. The highlight for many members were the pictures of the mines and canals under The Wrens Nest and Castle Hill that are no longer accessible.

2009

December - No Meeting

2010

19th January

Keith Hodgkins - Black Country from the Air

16th February

Andrew Lound - Return to the Titanic

23rd March

John Selway - Traction Engines

14th April - Dudley Canal Trust **AGM**

Vic Smallshire - Building the Elan Valley Dams

18th May

Mike Duley - Update on DCT Trips, Todds End Proposals

Parkhead Canal Festival 2010

This festival is traditionally a bi-annual event which has grown from strength to strength since the turn of the millennium.

As we finish with the working boat gathering this year at the BCLM I find, in the blink of an eye, we start organising the 6th Parkhead Canal Festival. The date is now set for 24th/25th/26th September 2010, so write it into your diaries and calendars now, because this is an event not to be missed, if 2008 is anything to go by .

But, like anything else, for every successful event there has to be a dedicated strong team of people behind it.

We rely heavily on sponsorship to make this festival happen. In 2008 we had help from "Awards for All", Wolverhampton Brewery, Cotteril Cook Printers Ltd, plus a few local businesses around the Peartree Lane area. I shall be contacting them, asking them if they can support us again in 2010. I do hope they will, but I also think that in the current financial climate we are going to struggle. The good news is that Cotteril Cook printers ltd. are helping us again with all our printing needs.

So this is where the DCT membership might be able to help. Can you think of any business that would like to help sponsor the festival? It can be someone you work for or someone you know that runs a business. It can be as little as £50 or up to a few hundred pounds. If they would like to promote themselves at our festival or if they want to supply a promotional banner, we will find a prominent spot to put it in front of a pound 10,000 people. They would automatically go into our programme which is handed out free to all our visitors.

We are also looking for more volunteers to help on the organising committee, on work parties during the weekend before, on the setting up of the site the week leading up to the show and during the festival weekend. There is always plenty to do, and not to forget the packing up on the Sunday night which we can only do after the show has finished at 5pm. We have to remind ourselves that the site that the festival is on belongs to Dudley MBC, the canal and towpath belongs to British Waterways so we are all accountable to to leave it in a better condition

than when we found it. So any help is better than none! Even if it's just a couple of hours, it does make a big difference, and if we can all pull together there's a chance this festival could be better than the 2008 show. So if anybody can help in any way please contact me:
email: ste.bingham@talktalk.net Tel: 07964151552 or 01384 214868
A big thank you must go to everybody who helped us in previous years, we hope to see you all again soon.

Steve Bingham.
Chairman of the Organising Committee

Towpath News

Well Halloween has passed us by for another year and we swiftly move on to decorating the Caverns ready for Santa. If anyone wants to help us decorate, paint or build scenery we would be very grateful.
Moving back to Halloween, we introduced Childrens Halloween trips for 2009 with the Groovy UV Glow in the Dark Characters. The children all came down in fancy dress and took a 10am trip into the Caverns to meet the Characters and thoroughly enjoyed the show. We will certainly continue this very successful event for 2010. This year for the evening ghost trips we had extremely good weather, very mild for the time of year. We had several characters on the Towpath hidden away and many screams (and sometimes a few expletives) were heard, with passengers who had already experienced it joining staff on the Towpath to laugh at others being shocked as they arrived.
The tour took in the history of the Caverns and some of the mining accidents that took place and were brought to life by a gruesome hospital scene, a miner's family experience and the usual slapstick finish complete with "maggots". Fun seemed to be had by all who attended.

June Hodgetts
General Manager, Dudley Canal Trust Trips Ltd
Tel: 01384 236275

Tunnel Vision

On Saturday September 5th, at around 8.15pm, our team of paranormal investigators "The Haunted Hussies", arrived at the Dudley Canal Tunnels. The evening was mild with no wind whatsoever. Soon after arrival, we were taken underground on two separate boats. The first one went to "Murder Mine", with three members only, which were team researcher, Jenny, one of the team mediums, Kevin, and Carol (with a camcorder). The rest of the team went on the second boat to the "Singing Cavern".

Whilst on the ledge at "Murder Mine", Kevin picked up on a number of different spirit energies, some residual, like a young man in his late teens or early twenties, possibly called Billy, "running in and out like he's found something", also a man called Frank. "They are both working here, and they've dug up something that they didn't expect to be here". Kevin also picked up on a blonde woman being dragged by the hair, by a foreman or similar, from an earlier time, "possibly what "they" found". A Charles was also picked up and a small scruffy dog. Several taps and shuffling noises were heard during the time they were in this location. Back on the the boat, as they went to join the rest of the team, Kevin said he could hear an elephant.

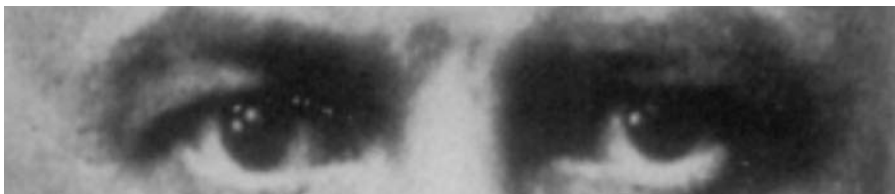
The other team members in the "Singing Cavern" were calling out for reactions from spirit energies to let themselves be heard or to show themselves, either physically or as light energies, some of which were captured on digital camera, as orbs of light. We heard a sound that some of the team thought was whispering, but the others thought was singing, as though from a distance. This was also caught on video, as were a couple of whistles. During this time, psychic artist and medium, John had been drawing a picture of a man. The name George had a link to him. When the team were all together again a séance was held, using our "Talk Board". The first spirit to come through was an Elizabeth, who died in 2001, she "said" she had been married one week before dying, and used to work in this area. Kevin said he felt like someone had cuffed him round the ear, which was visibly red. The next spirit to come through

was a George, a 24 year old, he gave us the year 1873. We asked if the picture John had drawn was of him. He replied No. John asked if George knew the other person that he, at the time, was picking up. The reply was yes, and the name given was Charles, a 15 year old, who died in a fall. I could hear a dog barking. When George was asked how he passed, he just spelled out "BANG". He also told us that there was a total of eight spirits around us at that time. John asked if the drawing was of Charles, to which George replied Yes. I said I felt someone go past, as I had felt a coldness go across me. Jenny said that someone was playing with her hair. Kevin asked if George could do something to Tina or Karen, who were standing about fifty to sixty metres away from the rest of the group. Almost immediately Tina asked if someone had just made a gasping noise, as she had just heard one. John drew another picture of a male, believed to be George. Some of the team were getting feelings of someone moving round and round the table behind them. Kevin said that there was someone else with us, who was making him feel sick. Charles then came on to the board, but only confirmed his name, and gave us nothing else.

On the trip out of the tunnels, we stopped in Castle Mill Basin, in complete darkness. As Jenny called out for any spirits with us to let us know that they were there, we heard a whistle. Something was heard to splash into the water. Several other whistle sounds were caught on video in the basin, although not all of them were heard by the team at the time. Our investigation finished at around 4.30am.

The team would like to thank the tunnel staff who stayed with us overnight, as we carried out this investigation, and would love to come back to carry out further investigations.

John Harvey, team administrator.



Bittell's Sorties

Having booked the Dudley Canal Trust display stand and Bittell into the Inland Waterways Association's national boat festival at Ratcliffe on Soar, Vic Smallshire assembled a crew and left the BCLM at 3.30pm on Thursday 20th August 2009. They got the tug to Wolverhampton by tea time where it was moored for the night in Broad St. Basin. The next day the crew arrived at 10am, having dropped cars off at Gailey, to tackle the 21 locks at Wolverhampton. By 4.30pm Bittell was tied up at the bottom of Gailey Lock.

Saturday 22nd - The tug was off again up the Staffs and Worcs Canal heading north east to Gt.Haywood where it spent its third night's berth.

Sunday 23rd - Bittell turned onto the Trent & Mersey Canal and started its journey east. After a busy day queueing up at locks the tug reached Fradley junction by 6pm and tied up for the night.

Monday 24th - After more car shuffling Bittell set off at 10.15am and promptly joined a queue of two boats waiting for the next lock. Around 1pm whilst slowing down to approach Wychnor Bridge some rubbish decided to get around the blades. The steerer selected reverse to attempt to wind the rubbish off the blades (as you do!) when suddenly there was NO GEARS!

So after switching the engine off and tying the boat up it was a case of investigating the cause, it was discovered that after many years of wear and tear the gear lever had broken in half. We don't carry spare gear levers in the tool kit so a quick temporary repair was needed and within half an hour Bittell was on its way again.

By 4pm the Tug entered the River Trent and tied up later at Willington.

Tuesday 25th - Bittell Departed Willington at 9.30am, and arrived at the Showground which was situated at Red Hill Marina, Ratcliffe on Soar, this would be Bittell's mooring for the next 6 days.



August 29th/30th/31st - I.W.A. National Boat Festival.

I arrived Saturday morning with the Dudley Canal Trust stand in the back of my car which was erected next to BCLM and the Friends of President stand (just like we never left home). The weather was dry and sunny but windy. There was some confusion about where Bittell was supposed to be moored, but in the end we got Bittell on the pontoon in the center of the show next to President. So we were next to our neighbours both with the stand and the boat.

(see other report)

Monday September 1st - It was an early get up and get going at 6.30am putting in a long first day, mooring up for the night at Alrewas at 7.45pm.

Wednesday 2nd - Departed Alrewas at 7am going steady along the Trent and Mersey canal then turning left at Gt.Haywood onto the Staffs & Worcs Canal before mooring for the night at Penkridge.

Thursday 3rd - Bittell left its mooring at Penkrudge at 10am climbing up the 21 lock hill back onto the BCN mooring at the top of Wolverhampton's Broad Street Basin for the night.

Friday 4th - A short day ahead, so the Tug left Wolverhampton at 8.25am to get back into the BCLM at 10.20am. The whole trip from the BCLM to the National and back clocked up 146 miles and 117 locks.

11th/12th/13th September - Black Country Boating Festival, Netherton which all happened on a very hot and sunny weekend, which saw record crowds of around 18,000 visitors. Bittell and The Flying Scott were moored up the boshboil arm, next to Alan Baker's steam roller, a perfect place to start handing out our leaflets advertising our Dudley Tunnel Trips. On the Sunday after the Historic Boat Parade Bittell left its mooring at 4pm towing the Flying Scott into the depths of Netherton Tunnel getting into the BCLM by 6.20pm.

19th/20th September - Tipton Canal Festival at Coronation Gardens which are only 10mins away from the Museum (which is quite handy). This was a new event for us which has been extended to two days now. So after mooring up Bittell & breasting up the Flying Scott alongside it, we set about talking to the many visitors that had arrived that wanted to learn more about canals. Later on Sunday the tug & joey returned to the BCLM having to wind up the lift bridge up, to get the two boats up Lord Wards Arm and moor it under the crane, ready for next weekend.

25th/26th/27th September - Working Boat Gathering at the BCLM. With glorious weather all weekend and a record number of Historic Working Boats in attendance, which were stacked out three abreast as far as Batson's Wharf. (see other report).

Wednesday 30th - Bittell & Flying Scott were towed through Dudley Tunnel in readiness for the next event. I checked over all the mechanical parts of the engine, and gave the boat a clean over.

Friday 2nd October - Bittell towed our aluminum safety boat to the Waterfront at Mer ry Hill. During Saturday Bittell was decorated, this years theme for the Water & Light Festival was Healthy Living, and needed to do something quick and easy. I found some rocking horses in my work shop, so after putting them all over the tug (Horse Riding, see!) we covered the rest of the boat with rope lights. At 7pm to loud music Bittell was in a parade of twelve boat parading around in the dark in front of around 10,000 visitors.

Monday 5th - Having stripped all the lights off Bittell, the tug was returned to Parkhead with the safety boat on tow, having had a good tidy up first, then moored up Jacks Arm.

Sunday 11th - Moved the tug out of Jacks Arm to Stourbridge via the 25 locks ahead, which we did in a record time of 3hrs 40 mins.

17th/18th October - Stourbridge Navigation Trust open weekend held at the Bonded Warehouse. Bittell was in its usual spot, under the crane on the wharf area, where I also put my two vintage lorries on show. The whole weekend was a success with around 98 boats booked in, the place was packed with vintage & classic cars, steam engines and organs. The weather was dry and sunny all weekend but with a cold nip in the air just to remind us that winter is only around the corner. The public came in their droves over the two days, it was nice to see so many happy smiling faces.

Sunday 8th November. Bittell & Sagitta are used for training DCT members.

Bittell would like to thank everybody who managed to move her from "A" to "B" over the last 8 months.

The total miles covered are 554, With 448 lock operations.

Steve Bingham

I.W.A. National Boat Show

We attended the "National" again this year staging a joint promotion of the Trust and the Tripping Company over the August Bank Holiday weekend.

We took along our gazebo to house all the paraphernalia required and commuted daily for the duration of the event.

The weather was cool and quite windy in sharp contrast to last year at Wolverhampton but the organisers maintain that numbers attending were much the same as before.

It soon became apparent that the site was too large for the number of exhibitors and visitors, with aisles and pathways so wide that it proved extremely difficult to engage the general public in order to sell ourselves and our attractions.

Despite all of these difficulties we raised funds selling tombola tickets and then took the opportunity to talk to the winners before handing over their prize (as every ticket is guaranteed a prize we were kept busy at times). With the event being held at Radcliffe on Soar, Nottingham we found that people knew of Dudley and the Black Country but not our activities and attractions. Perhaps Dudley tourism department could spread the word more effectively.

My thanks to everyone who helped, in particular Yvonne who spent hours ticketing up the prizes and then attending two of the three days, also Alan W & Steve B (Saturday) Alex P (Sunday) Mike D John W Gavin L & Janet P (Monday).

Bittell, our tug, was also in attendance but unfortunately we did not have enough volunteers to man her, but by a stroke of good fortune she ended up on a prime mooring which enabled us to just open the engine room doors and set up the information board for people to help themselves. We cannot measure how successful or otherwise these promotions are but we know we have enlightened a lot more people who otherwise would be unaware of our activities.

Alan Hazeldine

Working Boats At The BCLM

2009 was the turn of the Black Country Living Museum to organize the Working Boat Gathering for the 25th/26th/27th September. 56 Historic Boats arrived in style during the week before.

My job as harbourmaster was to somehow squeeze a quart into a pint pot, but with help from my assistant Francis Stapleton and the cooperation of the boat skippers & crews, we managed to somehow jiggle the boats around to get everybody in. But I did cheat slightly, because I had a piece of paper with a mooring plan on it that got changed several times during Friday, but by 6pm all the boats were in place and started settling down for the night.

It was a wonderful sight to see all the Working Boats stacked all around Lord Wards Arm and along the Main Line, stretching as far as Batsons Wharf, a scene that has not happened for many years. Someone said to me "It's just like it was in the good old days".

Around tea time, the Museum opened the Fish & Chip Shop so that the boaters could have a hot meal, followed by drinks in the Bottle & Glass pub.

As Saturday dawned the September mist was hanging around above the canal, followed by the smoke out of the chimney stacks from the boats, and the wonderful smell of eggs & bacon cooking. The forecast was dry, hot and sunny weather all weekend.

10am approached and visitors were coming over Broad Street Bridge and into the village to witness the sights and sounds of the Black Country at work.

The lift bridge was wound up by two very strong young men and we proceeded with the task ahead of using the hand crane on the canalside to load the wooden packing cases into the joey boat (Flying Scott). These were delivered by a 1932 model A Ford Lorry, with the tug Bittell on hand to tow the joey out onto the main canal.

As this was happening the furnace was lit in the Rolling Mills to start heating up the bars of steel. These were around 2ins square and 4ft long. By the time Bittell had returned to be unloaded, the Rolling Mills were in



full swing, with red hot steel bars being thrown across the floor, picked up with tongs and fed through the rollers several times until they were around 10ft long 1/4ins thick.

It was a wonderful sight to see this happen, with the noise of the machinery shaking the whole place. It was just like how things used to be around the Black Country not that long ago, and as Saturday drew to a close everybody retired back to their respective abodes.

Later that night, the entertainment in the Bottle & Glass was a "sing along" with John Hadley playing the piano under candlelight. A barbecue was held in the pub courtyard, the beer flowed well and everybody joined in the singing, a happy atmosphere prevailed.

Sunday morning arrived with the sun shining and the birds twittering, in the background could be heard the roaring of lions waiting for their breakfast (the Museum being very close to Dudley Zoo).

Once again the smell of a cooked breakfast sizzling on the hot boatmans stoves wafted across the museum site, and all too soon it was time to get ready for another busy day of welcoming the visiting public.

The whole idea behind this event is to educate visitors and children in the hard life that the working boatmen and women had to go through just to earn a living. There were demonstrations of some of the skills that were around in those days, such as horsemanship, fender making, signwriting the cabins of the working boats and the art of painting roses and castles onto the buckby cans that the boatmen used for keeping their water supply.

During the day the tugs were busy at work showing the skills of towing joey boats tied together in long trains, around the very tight corners on the canal and also demonstrating the difficult act of reversing the joeys up and around Lord Wards Arm. Over the weekend the TV presenter Alan Heard of "Narrowboat Afloat" fame was with a film crew doing a documentary on working boats, which will be aired sometime next April on the Discovery channel.

By 4pm the Historic Boats had warmed up their engines and were starting to disperse, heading back to their respective homes, all having had a wonderful weekend at the Black Country Living Museum.

The Working Boats that attended were: Adder, Aquarius, Aldgate, Alcor Atlas, Bellatrix, Bittell, B.H.P.No2, Buckden, Brighton, Beaulieu, Battersea, Barnet, Coventry, Corona, Cassiopia, Enterprise No 1, Elland, Flying Scott, FMC 138, GWR15, GWR19, Governor, Gerald 13, Hadley, Hyperion, Ilford, Jaguar, Kestral, Kildare, Leo, Linda, Lillian, Manchuria, Monarch, Minnow, Malus, Nanson 2, Nueaton, Owl, President, Peacock, Pacific, Renfrew, Sagitta, Stour, Swallow, Sharpness, Sickle, Spondre d g e Saltaire, Staff oaf, Seaford, Thea, Victoria, Whitby.

2011 is the date for the next working boat gathering at the B.C.L.M. Next year 24th/25th/26th September 2010, the fun moves back to the the southern portal of Dudley Tunnel, which is the venue for the very popular Parkhead Canal Festival, where a warm welcome will await all who attend.....

Steve Bingham



Members Day

Many thanks to all the members who attended the Members Day on November 8th. It was gratifying to see such a good turnout. I hope that everyone enjoyed themselves and got a go at steering the boats.



Web-Log

This is the first report of an exciting new scientific investigation in our tunnels and mines. To follow developments the web addresses of some related Blogs are available on our website.- Ed

www.dudleytunnel.co.uk

It is after much persuasion and a slight telling off by Uncle Bob that I have finally sat down to divulge the specifics of the 'Spider Project'.

The 'Spider Project', as it has commonly become known, is an ecological project that has been undertaken voluntarily by moi with the support of my supervisors Dr Jeremy Pritchard and Prof Jeffrey Bale of the University of Birmingham. It has been financially supported by the British Ecological Society (BES) by being awarded a small ecological grant and has received interest from the British Arachnological Society.

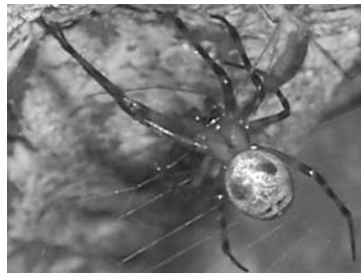
The project itself was conceived by my own curiosity and burning biological nosiness. Being a biologist in the making, and too young to be cynical, I generally find most natural things fascinating. In the years I have worked as a part time skipper for Dudley Canal Trust I was always fascinated at the sheer amount of creepy crawlies in the tunnels. In particular the little gems that dangle nicely from the tunnel roof, especially making a celebrity-like appearance on through-tunnel trips and ghost tours.

Those who take the time to observe the roof will notice there are hundreds of spiders down the Dudley Canal Tunnels, those observing more closely would notice that the spiders are more abundant in some tunnels than in others. This observation lead me to conclude a variety of different hypotheses; firstly that the relative distance to an exit may have a bearing on the colonisation by spiders; secondly, that the species down the tunnels may have some adaptive advantage to living 'underground'; thirdly, that there must be minimum parameters for survival, i.e. prey abundancy, abiotic conditions such as light intensity, humidity and temperature. But in the world of science a hypothesis needs to be proved logically, consistently and executed in a repeatable way until it becomes undeniable fact.

So to test the hypotheses and to satisfy my curiosity as to what spider species exactly inhabit our dark realms, I wrote a grant proposal for the two year ecological survey which obtained the backing described above. What I did not expect to accompany the low-profile project was a wave of media attention that followed this summer, brought about by a brilliant press release issued by the BES press officer Becky Allen. On June 3rd Midlands Today broadcast a 5 minute piece on the spider project at the end of the regional news. This was followed by a pre-recorded radio interview on Radio WM in June and a live telephone interview in August. The project has also been covered in a variety of internet blogs. I think the major attributing factor to the mass attention was my mention of potentially uncovering a population of cave spiders (*Meta menardi*/*Meta bourneti*) in our tunnels. Sounds scary but let me explain.....

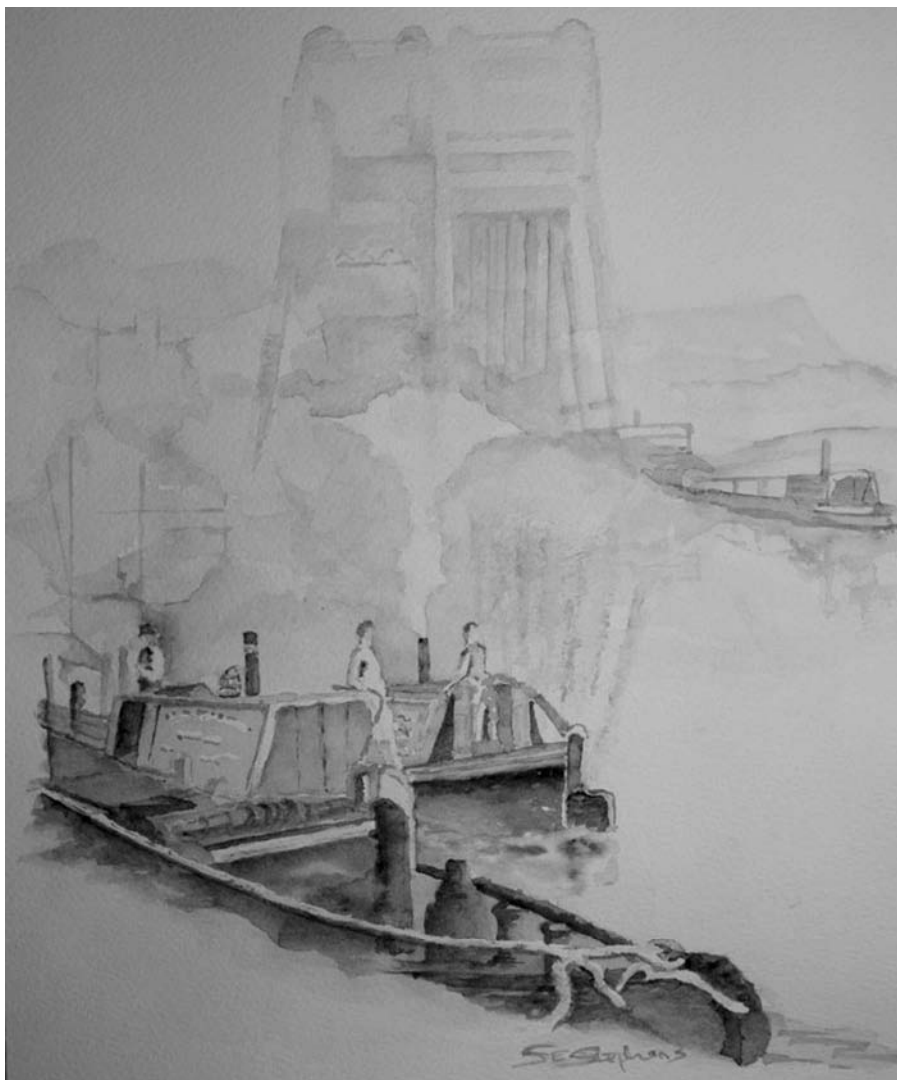
The Cave Spider is the second largest native spider in Britain, with adults being able to achieve a legspan of over 5cm. They are rarely seen due to their photophobic nature, preferring to live in total darkness. The nearest known population to Dudley is in Lichfield, so the possibility of it being in the Dudley Tunnels is exciting. They aren't harmful to humans and very interesting to scientists in their evolutionary dispersal mechanism and special adaptations. Unfortunately in the study we haven't spotted any yet but have seen many closely related species. So where is all this going? Well the project is in its infant days. However, there are students already lined up to conduct dissertation projects, analysing the data recorded in the caverns, and of course the potential to get some good science published.

But will it end there? Well there is a major potential to start assessing how keeping the Dudley Canal Tunnels open all these years is benefiting wildlife, in creating a unique environment for colonisation and settlement. In my eyes the Dudley Canal Tunnel is an elusive ecological gem worth investigation and conservation for centuries to come.



Laura Vickers

Painting The Cut



The Anderton Boat Lift

Stan Stephens is a DCT member, boater, jazz trombonist, chairman of the local (Dudley & South Staffs) branch of CAMRA and one of the leading lights behind the world renowned beer tent at the Black Country Boating Festival held at Windmill End. He also paints.

DUDLEY CANAL TRUST

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

I/We wish to become members of the Dudley Canal Trust and enclose the annual subscription of £.....

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(Mr / Mrs / Ms).....

(Mr / Mrs / Ms).....

(Mr / Mrs / Ms).....

(Mr / Mrs / Ms).....

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Tick here if you wish to be informed of working parties details are also available on www.dudleytunnel.co.uk

Dudley Canal Trust Proposed Learning And Access Hub

