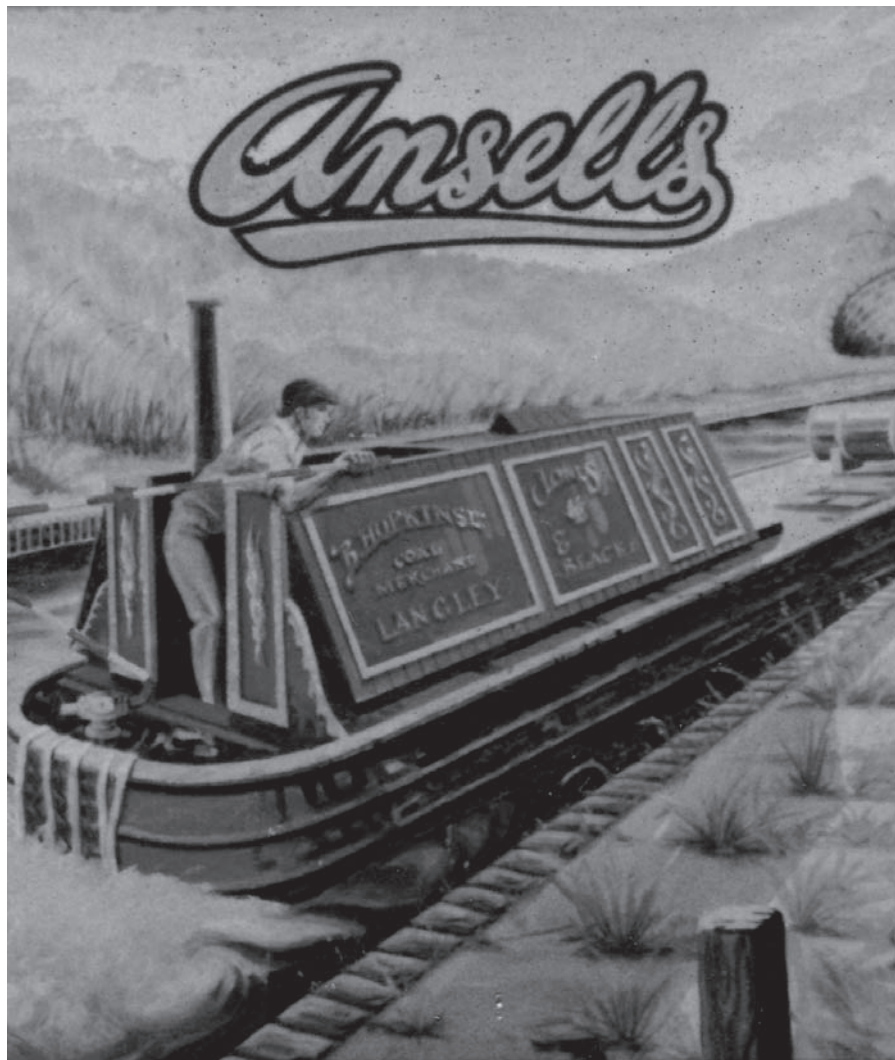


THE LEGGER



THE JOURNAL OF THE DUDLEY CANAL TRUST
AUTUMN 2010

No. 218

DUDLEY CANAL TRUST

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Sept 2010) by John Hadley

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Editorial

It were reminiscent of a scene from the film *The African Queen*, the weed was nearly impassable from Wolverhampton to Tipton. There was a narrow channel that had been mowed down the centre of the cut, but it was of little help as we had to stop and firtle (clear the blades with a shaft) at frequent intervals. The mineral rich water being pumped out of the mines at Bradley, by British Waterways to keep the summit level full, was a great source of nutrition for the weed, creating a new and different problem for boaters. If it's not one thing it's another! Lack of water or impenetrable weed, a difficult choice, hopefully the weed will die back over the winter, but problems, locally and nationally, around the canals will be with us for the foreseeable future, with no solutions in sight.

Gavin Lawson
Editor
legger@live.co.uk

Comments, Complaints, Ideas, Letters, Articles and Pictures are welcome

Deadline for the next edition Tuesday 9th November.

DCT Open Weekend

The date is now set for DCT to host their Open Weekend on 25th/26th September 2010 around our Pumphouse in Peartree Lane, Dudley. During the two days there will be Boat Trips, Canal Craft Stalls, Vintage Vehicles and Engines, Historic Boats plus catering.

All this can only be possible if we all pull together to man the event, so any help will be much appreciated. There will be a meeting in the Pumphouse on 15th September at 8pm to go through the areas where help is required during the Open Weekend. So if anybody wishes to volunteer, please attend the meeting or contact me.

Thank you.

Steve Bingham
01384 214868 or ste.bingham@talktalk.net

Chairman's Notes

The last proper Chairman's notes I wrote were for the Spring edition of *The Legger*. For the Summer edition you had to make do with my report to the AGM. Here I am, early August writing my notes for the Autumn edition. How time flies when you are enjoying yourself!

The point I want to make is that since I last specifically wrote for *The Legger* we have had a change of Government. The new incumbents have found the country in an impoverished state and we are threatened with deep cuts in public funding across the board. Normally this would not be of great concern to us. Neither Dudley Canal Trust nor its Tripping Company receive any subsidy. We make the money to pay our own bills and fund modest improvements from our own resources. This means that, because we don't have one, our subsidy can't be cut, or taken away.

However, we are not above seeking grants for capital works such as for our new, much needed, visitor handling facilities at Todd's End. Without such grants our aspirations will be cut back to a self funded new wooden shed to handle our very respectable 80,000 visitors a year.

We were hoping to get some sort of a grant from Advantage West Midlands only to learn that they are about to get their neck wrung by our impoverished Government. This is a pity because AWM made a very substantial contribution to The Severn Valley Railway to help repair the damage to the line after the disastrous floods of a couple of years ago. In other words, helping established tourist attractions is one of the things they did.

Another potential source of funding should be from the lottery through one of its funds. The heritage lottery fund would seem appropriate, but guess what? All the lottery funds have been trimmed by 30% to fund the London Olympics in 2012. So the same number of schemes are chasing less money. My understanding of the National Lottery Act was that, although the purchase of a lottery ticket has been called a tax on the stupid, the proceeds should not be regarded by the Government as income from taxation, and certainly should not be spent on projects that would normally be expected to be funded by the Government from taxation. After all, who paid for the Olympics before the Government had the lottery to fall back on?

British Waterways have had their funding cut over the last few years and can look forward to even deeper cuts in the future. They are looking for a way out by seeking a move into what is being called the third sector. That is, not a purely commercial enterprise or a public body, but something along the lines of The National Trust or, wait for it, Dudley Canal Trust. I would like to welcome BW to our ranks but there is something called a learning curve, or is it a steep gradient, to be climbed first. I am sure we would have something to teach them about how to survive in a world without a Government subsidy.

Whilst on the subject of the impoverished state of the nation, I am sure that you will be aware of increasingly bold metal thefts, presumably to fund the next hot meal or more likely the next fix of an illegal substance. Over the last year or so there have been several attempts, with varying degrees of success, to remove the lead from the roof of the Pumphouse at Blowers Green. For the record, it is no longer lead on the roof.

It is with great sadness that I have to report that the bronze plaque commemorating the reopening of the canal in 1973, sited adjacent to Parkhead Top Lock, has been stolen. The bronze was manufactured from a copper ingot found in the canal, melted down with 1kg of tin ingots which I purchased from a wonderful emporium of exotic metals in Birmingham's jewellery quarter. The melting and casting were done by Edwin Fasham in his back garden foundry. I hope he still has the pattern. The subject has not yet been discussed by your committee but it is unlikely that a replacement will be made in a metal of high intrinsic value in the near future. What is particularly sad is that unless the thieves have the means of melting their ill gotten gains into an unrecognisable form, there is a scrap yard somewhere that is prepared to pay good money for what is clearly a commemorative plaque with no questions asked. I suppose that we should be grateful, if not amazed, that our plaque lasted 37 years before attracting the attention of the metal thieves.



Have You Seen Our Plaque?

Progress Report - Learning And Access Hub

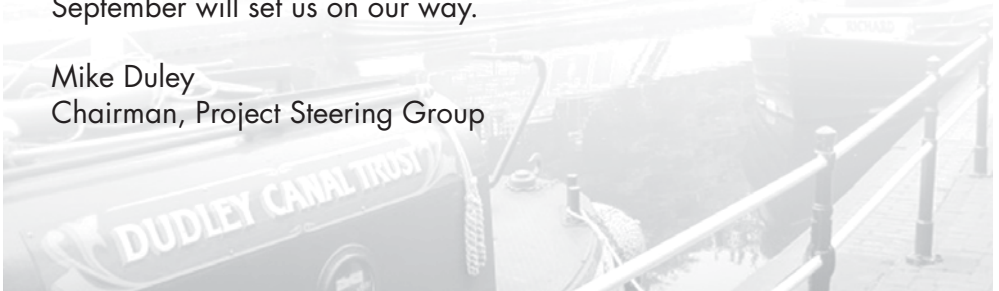
The current situation is that we have put in a revised first-round application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for just over £100,000 to cover development costs such as finalising plans for buildings, car park and bridge; required environmental and site surveys; planning permission; etc, etc. The decision will be made mid September and we are keeping our fingers crossed.

There was a strong possibility that Natural England and Advantage West Midlands would grant us £250,000 and £50,000 respectively for the car park and swing bridge across the canal and, to reinforce our application, planning permission was needed by the end of August. To produce the application in the week or so available to us and to keep costs down, our architects used the car park layout from the Peoples Lottery Bid and a bridge design passed to us by British Waterways. Neither are what we will eventually want but the plans can be amended to suit our specific requirements.

In the event, the government is closing Advantage West Midlands and through them Natural England and so a £300,000 funding opportunity has disappeared. This is very disappointing but there are other options open to us that we are actively pursuing. As we no longer have need for a 'quick fix' planning permission at Todd's End, we are probably withdrawing our application.

In spite of the current financial climate we are very optimistic as we do have a tremendous advantage in that we run a very successful visitor attraction and the proposed development can only add to that. We understand that quite a number of marginally viable schemes have been shelved and although obtaining finance for any project is very difficult and there is less funding available, fewer charitable organisations are applying. Hopefully the Heritage Lottery Fund decision in mid September will set us on our way.

Mike Duley
Chairman, Project Steering Group



Membership Matters

One of the nice things about becoming Membership Secretary again (after an absence of 22 years) is wallowing in nostalgia when looking through the card-index of names and addresses. It never ceases to amaze me the number of early Members we still have - starting back in 1964 - and whom we still have regular contact/activity with.

Fortunately, as we get older we manage to attract new Members who find our organisation interesting and worthwhile, particularly now we have two boats to take to various canal rallies - the tug Bittell and the full-length narrowboat Sagitta. Any Members who would like to spend a day boating or helping at rallies will be made most welcome and may well find it a very rewarding experience.

Membership of the Trust also offers free trips on our standard $\frac{3}{4}$ hour round the mines tour, monthly work parties on the canal during the summer and, of course, our quarterly magazine *The Legger*. Any Members who think they may have a particular skill or any professional contacts/experiences which could be of use to the Trust are encouraged to make themselves known at Social Meetings, work parties or just sending an e-mail (or snail-mail) to the Trust.

We have always been a very busy Trust and with the current project of the new Hub building at Todd's End we may well need all the help we can get to make it a successful scheme.

Looking back through recent editions of *The Legger* it appears that I am behind with welcoming new Members to the Trust, so to bring us up to date I have had to start in February of this year. We extend a warm welcome to the new Members listed opposite.

If anyone has a specific query regarding membership please contact me at home on 01902 896062

Richard Jones
Membership Secretary

Mr J Ganner	Stourbridge
Miss O Wood	Winchester
Miss O Wythes	Winchester
Mr E Hunt	Walsall
Mr B Clift	Dudley
Mr J Robinson	Gloucester
Mr G Blackmore	Walsall
H Blackmore	Walsall
Mr A Wild	Wednesfield
Mrs D Bagley	Netherton
Mrs L Bodin	Kingswinford
Mr & Mrs Lloyd	Coseley
Mr & Mrs Atking	Dudley
Ms J Read	Stourbridge
Mr E Robertson	Lancashire
Mrs J Truby	Penmaenmawr
Mr G Skitt	Burton-on-Trent
Mrs K Parsons	Wolverhampton
Mr P Grove	Halesowen
Mr G Colbourne	Dudley
Mrs J Tonkin	Cradley Heath
Mr P Stone	Cradley Heath
Mr Richards	Bilston
Mrs Palmer	Bilston
Mrs P Perriss	Oxfordshire
Mr & Mrs R Langford	Shropshire
Miss Anni & Mstr Wil Langford	Shropshire
Rhys & Tomas Evans	Shropshire
Mr M Jeffery	Reading
Mr A Mills	Oldbury
Mr M Tizard	East Rudhan
Mr L Sadler-Moore	Stoubridge
Mr & Mrs Careless	Walsall
Mr & Mrs Sibley	Berkshire
Mr L Banks	Walsall
Mrs Reynolds	Walsall
Mr V Peters	Sedgley
Miss P Farnell	Cannock
Mr R Stone	Cannock

Social Events

Dudley Canal Trust social meeting dates 2010/11

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

19th October 2010

Liam D'Arcy Brown - The Grand Canal of China

www.liamdarcybrown.co.uk

16th November 2010

Vic Smallshire - DCT Restoration

December 2010 - None

18th January 2011

Keith Hodgkins - Black Country from the Air Part 2

15th February 2011

John Lower - Chesterfield Canal

Towpath News

The busy summer holidays are upon us and we experience the reality of fifteen minute intervals between boats and the joy of all the families taking their children into the tunnels to experience the legging. We hope we may welcome some of you on the boat trips through the summer holidays to enjoy our wonderful summer weather.

We extend a warm welcome to our new skipper Brian Atkins.

Work to improve the Portal in Shirtmill Basin is underway and a big thank you to Stuart and Mark, our volunteer team, who are helping to bring the contractors in and out and ferry materials around the system for them without any interference with the public trips.

We are currently selling tickets for our Childrens' Halloween events and Cinderella Santa experience so if any readers want to take their children or grandchildren, get in early to reserve your tickets.

June Hodgetts

General Manager, Dudley Canal Trust (Trips) Ltd.

What's In A Name

As a result of many questions asked by the general public and new members concerning the Trust and the Tripping Company, your editor has asked me to briefly explain how it all works.

It's quite simple really, the Trust was formed nearly 50 years ago with the principal aim to prevent the closure of the Dudley Canal Tunnel.

Initially, a bunch of like-minded young people commandeered old leaky joey boats in order that anyone interested would have a chance to boat through the tunnel before the authorities closed it for good. These people, all volunteers, with help from many sources including a far sighted and sympathetic local authority, cleaned out the approaches at both ends of the tunnel to enable this to take place.

Such was the popularity of boat trips into the tunnel that it became apparent that volunteers could not cope alone and just at weekends. After all, they all had day jobs to go to. So a Company, Dudley Canal Trust (Trips) Limited, was set up with paid staff to run the day to day operations on behalf of the Trust.

Subsequently, caverns were re-opened, new connecting tunnels built and audio visual equipment installed.

The Trust itself has 6 Trustees and the affairs are handled by a committee with a Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary who are elected annually by the membership. The Tripping Company has its own Board of Directors which includes the aforementioned 3 officers of the Trust. Any surplus from the Tripping Company's operations is paid to the Trust.

As you can see, we are a single organisation but, out of necessity, made up of two components.

A point to make to all members is that you belong to the Trust but the Company is very grateful for any help you may give in the running of their operation. When volunteering for the Company you must, by necessity, conform to their supervision due to insurances, Health & Safety Regulations, etc.

These few lines of explanation do not take into account the enormous amount of work carried out by many, many people both past and present who have made our organisation the envy of many other canal related bodies in offering what is a unique and world class experience to the general public.

Alan Hazeldine

Trouble Up Titford

After the cancellation of the Pelsall rally back in February due to the problems at Chasewater Reservoir, the Birmingham Canal Navigation Society moved their summer rally to Titford Pumphouse. Ironically, the reason for this decision was because of the possible lack of water up on the 'Curly Wyrley' canal. Little did they know that a week before the event a water problem would hit Titford, with vandals draining down the canal water the weekend before the event! The level had dropped around 2ft over the entire length of the top pound including Titford pools. So British Waterways started back pumping which only managed to suck up the oil off the bottom of the canal where Claytons yard used to be; the Environment Agency put a stop to that!

It looked like the event would have to be cancelled due to lack of water, or be held elsewhere. But the BCNS and BW were determined to save the event. Bringing in a separate pump they started pumping water from the bottom of the 'Crow' up the flight of six locks to the summit (which is the highest point on the BCN). As luck would have it we also had a wet week leading up to the show, never before had rain been so welcome. By Thursday the water had reached its proper level and BW were accepting boats up the flight. We motored Bittell, towing the Flying Scott, from Parkhead to Titford on the Friday to join the 50 or so boats that were moored along the towpath. On the Saturday, on the Flying Scott in the top lock, we set up the first floating Skittle Alley, giving anybody a free go. As a bonus the sun shone for the majority of the weekend.

By 1pm Sunday we had decided it was time to descend the six locks, helping our sister ship Pacific down the locks. As we motored along the Wolverhampton level towards Tipton people walking the towpath thought they were seeing double as Pacific was leading followed by Bittell towing the Flying Scott. The boats continued in convoy until we got to Brades Junction where Pacific carried on to moor at Todd's End for the night whilst Bittell and the joey boat turned right to go down the staircase locks to the Birmingham level. Before long, coming out of the portal of Netherton Tunnel, the heavens opened up and the rain never eased off all the way to Parkhead.

Steve Bingham



Photographs Steve Bingham

A Day At The Palace

In January I received a letter from something called DCMS which turned out to be the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. This unlikely assembly of apparently unrelated components into a government department must have been cobbled together out of all the bits that nobody else wanted, rather like when God created bats out of all the leftovers of creation. Flying mice indeed!

What had I done to deserve a letter from such a strange, but all embracing, government department? I have never been accused of having any culture, although I do occasionally find some mould in the fridge. I do consider myself to be sporting, although I don't play games. So far as media is concerned, my connections are tenuous, although people who watch too much telly tell me I am on it all the time. In my defence I would claim that my accumulated contribution to any sort of media still adds up to infinitesimal.

Further reading of my mysterious letter revealed that, "In view of your outstanding services to heritage, it has been suggested to us that you may be interested in having your name put forward to attend a Royal Garden Party, given by Her Majesty The Queen, at Buckingham Palace." I was asked to indicate if I would like my name to be passed to The Palace for consideration to receive an invitation. I couldn't see that anyone would not want their name put forward and I was certainly not going to let the opportunity of a lifetime pass me by. Being allowed to take a guest I nominated my daughter Heather.

Who, I wondered had suggested that I may be interested in receiving an invitation? Having been a thorn in the side of every government for forty years (one does not protect heritage, especially canals, without upsetting people in high places), could someone be trying to buy me off? On the other hand, had I really made so much difference that someone had actually noticed?

Although specifically why I had been nominated for this honour was not made clear, it was fairly obvious that unless it was for my modest contribution towards restoring the Welsh Highland Railway, my work for the Dudley Canal Trust since its inception over 40 years ago could be the only reason. At this point I felt a little guilty. The DCT is a team and what we have achieved has always been the result of a team effort. To receive this honour against a background of so many others'

equally hard work, did not sit comfortably with me. But my fellow Trust members should feel free to bask in the reflected glory.

The letter had arrived at a time when I was not enjoying the best of health and three months into what turned out to be eight months of debilitating chemotherapy. Its arrival did lift my spirits and gave me something to look forward to when only a few weeks earlier the future had looked very bleak indeed. All that remained now was to wait and see if I was successful in receiving an invitation.

In May an envelope carrying a Buckingham Palace post mark arrived. It seems that the palace has its own post office. The envelope also carried a stamp indicating that it was from the Lord Chamberlain. Inside were lots of goodies, most important of which was a smart white card headed by the ER cipher announcing that, "The Lord Chamberlain is commanded by Her Majesty to invite Mr Victor Smallshire to a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace on Tuesday, 22nd June 2010 from 4 to 6pm." In very small print at the bottom were the words, "This card does not admit". The purpose of the card is purely to show off to your friends and eventually frame to hang on the living room wall to impress the people you missed the first time round. A second, much less impressive card gets you through the gates.

There was also a card with a list of does and don'ts. Photography in the palace grounds is forbidden, so leave your camera at home. Uniforms may be worn, but not medals, and I am so proud of my Parkhead 1970 campaign medal! National costume may be worn but I couldn't think of one that didn't involve bells on the legs and waving handkerchiefs about. A pass allowed me to park my car on the horse rides adjacent to The Mall. This was to remain unused as I have only driven around London in a Land Rover and have no intention of trying it in a lesser vehicle. I would also have had to pay the London congestion charge of which I have no knowledge except that it is very expensive if you get it wrong.

On the day, we travelled by train to Euston then by underground to Westminster. Here we called in for lunch at No 1 Great George Street, the HQ of the Institution of Civil Engineers. Having impressed my daughter with the places I can use to dine in London and showed her the lecture theatre where I once performed, telling the story of how two new canal tunnels had been constructed for the furtherance of tourism in Dudley, we made our way towards The Palace through St James's Park. Here we played a game of spot the people who were on their

way to a garden party. The ladies were evident by their big hats and the gents by their smart suits with a smattering of top hats and tail coats. On arriving at The Palace we joined the queue at the gates. Here an important decision had to be made. So far, in spite of posh suit, I had escaped the need to wear a tie. A look at others in the queue indicated that it would be a good idea to wear one although the guidelines on dress were silent on the subject. I usually carry several for emergencies. I have one vivid psychedelic tie specifically designed to induce a migraine attack in all who have the misfortune to encounter it. This usually has the desired effect of being asked to remove it soon after putting it on. However, on this occasion, I had equipped myself with a grey tie bearing the DCT seal which I must have had for years but had not used much. This would render me 'respectable' for the rest of the day.

At the gates a policeman inspected the ticket and passport we were each asked to bring with us. Several more policemen were on hand to remove anyone who didn't look like their passport photo. Having gained admission we walked across the parade ground in front of The Palace, past the guards and through the archway into the central courtyard. Here we entered The Palace and shuffled through several rooms and corridors before emerging from the music room onto the terrace at the rear. From here one gets a commanding view over the gardens before descending the grand flight of steps to the lawn.

Along the left hand side of the lawn was the several hundred yard long buffet marquee. The right hand side of the lawn was bounded by an area fenced off for the "Corps Diplomatique" whoever they were, with a very grand marquee. Evidently one had to be very important to get in there. Beyond that was the Royal Tea Tent. You had to be very, very important to get in there.

Half an hour after entry we were eating our first cucumber sandwiches. There were two military bands. One, at the foot of The Palace steps, played film themes and other popular tunes throughout the afternoon. At the other end of the lawn, near the lake, was an RAF band playing Glen Miller swing type music. Although the bands were far enough apart not to interfere with each other they took it in turns to do 15 minute sets. We took the opportunity to explore the 40 acre grounds, laid out by James I in 1609, and were amazed at the quiet woodland paths and shady lawns that could be found, isolated from the roar of London's traffic.

Over 8000 people are invited to each of three garden parties held every year, maintaining a tradition started by Queen Victoria in the 1860s.

The afternoon inevitably turned into a people-watching event. Was it possible that the Mayor of every town in the Kingdom had been invited? Certainly, I had never seen so many in one place before, all identifiable by their very grand chains of office. Come to think of it you only usually see them one at a time. One was the spitting image of David Lloyd George, the firebrand Welsh Prime Minister, who I seem to remember knew my father! Or was it the other way round?

I noticed that most of the wearers of top hats and tail coats were all big fellows with little bits of wire going into their ears, and bulges under their coats. Such camouflage!

Many guests appeared to be ordinary people like myself selected for some charitable work. There were a lot of uniforms in evidence, both military and ecclesiastical. The military seemed to be selected from all ranks and I spent some time sharing the shade of a tree and chatting to a member of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. The clerics appeared to cover everything from vicars of country churches to bishops, judging by their grand red and purple robes, although there were no mitres on show. They had probably left them all in a corner somewhere.

Rumour had it that some entertainers were on the guest list but I didn't see anyone I recognised. It seems that an invitation goes with the job for Politicians of a certain ilk but subsequent events indicate that such an invitation does not guarantee admission at the gate. No such excitement on the day of our visit.

The only disaster of the day was when my daughter noticed another lady wearing an identical dress. This was brushed off with a swift, "Well it looks better on me." And of course it did.

At 4pm the band played the national anthem and Her Majesty The Queen appeared at the top of The Palace steps. The Yeoman of the Guard formed an avenue through the thronging crowd for Her Majesty to walk through, greeting selected guests as she went. Of course we joined the thronging masses. As the crowd followed we worked our way to the front for a few moments. Some were intent on staying as close to The Queen for as long as they could. We, having got as close as we could for a few moments and heard her greet a couple of guests, retired to the now virtually empty buffet marquee for some more cucumber sandwiches and a cup of tea.

Later, The Queen retired to the Royal Tea Tent with a few very, very important people. At 6pm the band played the national anthem, The Queen ascended the terrace steps and disappeared inside. That was it. It was all over! The crowds thronged back through The Palace and into the real world.

A day full of memories, and for me a personal triumph. Apart from snatching a rest for ten minutes on a couple of seats that were being vacated as we passed them, I had been on my feet for over 4 hours and walked a good couple of miles. A few months earlier I couldn't get out of a chair without help.

On the train home I couldn't help reflecting on the fact that had I recently forced a passage along a legally abandoned canal, full of dead dogs and railway sleepers, against the will of Parliament, all I could expect in the post would be an invitation to explain myself to a judge, with the expectation of an anti social behaviour order to follow. Because those events took place a little while ago and resulted in that same derelict canal becoming the busiest canal in the country, now making an important contribution to the local economy, I get an invitation to a Royal Garden Party. Such irony!

God Save the Queen!

Vic Smallshire



Heather and Vic Smallshire

Sagitta Coordinator

This new post has been created by the Trust in order to formalise and concentrate Sagitta's activities through a single point of contact and thereby streamline the whole operation.

The yearly itinerary for the boat will be drawn up and agreed by your committee (venues, dates etc) and then be issued to the coordinator to arrange the crewing/demonstrating personnel requirements.

Della Sadler-Moore has accepted and been appointed to this post and I would like everyone to assist her in this task, especially with things such as route planning, overnight stops, crew changeovers and all the small details that make for successful voyages.

Della has already put in a lot of hard work to this post and is not short of ideas but please feel free to put in your own thoughts and comments to help make this a smooth running operation. Della will report back to the committee on a regular basis in order that we can make any changes to improve things.

As an organisation, we had not given enough thought or help to Sagitta's running operation; this has now been addressed and we look forward to a more organised and beneficial method of boat movement. Our best wishes and thanks to Della in this new post.

Della: mobile 07736 061258 e-mail DellaM@wvl.ac.uk

Alan Hazeldine
DCT Committee



Della. Photograph Steve Bingham

A Conflict Of Interest - Part 1

I seem to spend an increasingly inordinate amount of time around canals at the moment and this is primarily because they open themselves up to many pastimes and occupations, in some of which I find myself a participant. When canals were designed and built over 200 years ago, I doubt very much that the likes of Messrs Brindley or Telford envisaged their use would be for anything but transport. However, a sunny Sunday morning will see all manner of people descend on their local 'cut' to fish, walk, cycle, boat, paint, photograph, picnic and generally relax and prepare for the week ahead. I have to confess that I partake in a number of these pursuits, so here then are a few observations on each of these activities. The reader needs to bear in mind of course that, although I try not to be biased to one or the other too much, you will no doubt be able to rank my preferences by the end of these musings. I must also extend apologies in advance if any of our dear readers find they come into a category I am less than courteous about.

The Cyclist

It seems a little ironic that the canals were developed because wheels were such a useless method of transporting great hulks around the country, and yet bicycles and the great hulks that seem to ride them are now a part and parcel of the towpath community. Where they pass pedestrians there seems to be no written guidelines concerning right of way so the pedestrian has to make a quick decision on whether to step politely to one side or 'face out' the oncoming bullet. The coward in me wins each time and I step smartly to one side to let the contraptions through; pleased when I get a 'thank you' and enraged when I don't. With the latter I wait until the ignoramus is well on their way before hurling a sarcastic volley at the disappearing dust cloud (by well on their way, read half a mile). A friend of mine used to front them out and let the cyclist detour over the rough ground, however this stopped last year when he stood his 'towpath ground' for an elderly couple. Turning to watch as they weaved their way around him, he failed to see 20+ speed, trial, club cyclist types approaching at something approaching mach 2, who basically rode straight over him. I swear

to this day if he overdoes the sun you can make out a 'Dunlop' tattoo running up his left cheek.

But perhaps my most endearing memory regarding bikes on towpaths occurred many moons ago. I was passing a Saturday afternoon fishing in Wombourne when a school friend of mine rolled up on a rather dilapidated bicycle. The fact that he started braking two bridges down should give you some idea of the state of this particular vehicle. We passed a few minutes talking about football, school etc, and then with a "see ya" thrown over his shoulder off he rode, straight over the bank and disappeared below the surface with a rather startling sploosh. I tell you now, if you purposely tried to do that you would still be nowhere near the elegance and grace in which he executed the move. No scream, no flailing arms, just straight in. In hindsight I should have held up a small card with 6.0 scrawled on it, but as it was I sat there open mouthed for a few seconds before going to his aid. Grabbing an outstretched hand I hauled this soggy, dripping youth back on to, but rapidly ceasing to be, dry land and then managed to haul the ever more rusting contraption soon after. He apologised profusely for the event, paying no heed to his rather moist appearance, and said it was a common occurrence and had happened five times over the past 12 months. Five times!!! He was more worried about my fishing being disturbed, poor lad. With one more apology, he mounted his steed and off he wobbled. I have spent many hours since wandering the canal network, but alas, have yet to see anyone demonstrate such wonderful lack of control of two wheels, although I have been tempted to try to orchestrate a similar event by the careful use of my fishing rod just as a cyclist trundles by behind me.

The Runner

At the age of 40, I suddenly realised middle aged spread was making its first approaches as I was quickly losing sight of my feet. Because of this I decided to start doing some exercise and took up running (for running think staggering). I chose my route carefully to ensure it passed various hostelrys etc and a short length of canal. I'm amazed at how fishable the canal looks as I jog down the towpath, and how much the conditions seem right for running whilst I sit trying to fish. I have also noticed that it takes me longer to run 2 miles along a towpath than it does to run the same distance along a road. I have concluded, after

much deliberation, that this is because when I run along a towpath I either keep stopping to look at prospective places to fish, or it's the added time for hurdling all the fishing poles left across the towpath. Fellow runners of canal towpaths are either pairs of females chatting as they go, solitary males lost in their own thoughts or, as in the case of the Staffs and Worcester canal in Wombourne, 100+ women of varying ages and sizes from a local running club. You may think that such numbers would cause a disturbance to other towpath users as they make their way, but strangely I have yet to meet any fellow fisherman or male runner who seems put out by meeting such a large group of the fairer sex. Strange. I think it needs a bit more investigation. I'll report back any of my findings.

There is one jogger that I have encountered, however, who tries to be courteous and warns any approaching obstacles that he is about to encounter by stating which side he intends to pass. The instruction of "going to the left" is of great help when he approaches from behind, and a small step to the right sees him pass safely by. Half an hour later and he's now approaching from the front on his return leg and again the warning of "passing to the left" is issued. I now know whose left he's on about, but the first time we met I had a panicky moment thinking 'my left or his?', guessed wrong and we ended in a heap inches from the water's edge. For some reason he now goes very wide when our towpaths cross and points exactly which route he's taking.

In the next part we'll meet The Angler, The Gongoozler (look it up) and hopefully The Walker

Alex Parker



Pub Sign. The Boat, Haveacre Lane, Coseley.

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As a prolific diner on Indian/Bangladeshi cuisine, your treasurer can wholeheartedly recommend the aforementioned restaurant. A little upmarket compared to your local curry house, with beautiful decor, wonderful friendly service and a menu second to none and at very reasonable prices. Closer home to Dudley is a balti in Great Bridge (Balti Nights) run by the same family with the same level of service at slightly cheaper prices but with no compromise in the quality. Well worth a visit for a special occasion or if just passing through.

Alan Hazeldine

Bittell Goes South

On Sunday 20th June we drove down to Braunston leaving one car in the car park before returning to Parkhead to collect Bittell. We set off at 4pm with the Birmingham level down around 3" off the weir making it a bumpy ride in some of the bridge holes but by 7.15pm we were tied up safely for the night in Cambrian Wharf in Birmingham.

Monday 21st June. Crew arrived around 9am starving hungry, so after making breakfast we set off joining a queue of five boats to go down Farmers Bridge Locks. It was very slow going all the way to the bottom lock until I had an idea! It looked like the boats in front were all going down Aston Locks so Bittell turned right and went down the Ashted flight via Ashted Tunnel. We turned left and left again until we came across the top lock of the Garrison flight which we descended without a problem. This was the long way around and one more lock to do but this was a better option than waiting in the long queue going down the Aston flight. At Salford Junction we turned sharp right just in front of the hire boat that was leading the pack of five boats, so Bittell was out in front and by tea time we had tied up by the top lock at Curdworth.

Tuesday 22nd June. Bittell started out at 8am only to catch up with more slow boats in the lock flight, so again it was a waiting game to take our turn for the next lock! We eventually turned right at Fazeley Junction onto the Coventry Canal until we got to Atherstone locks where a moored boat said to us "yer mate came past us yesterday". We worked out it must have been the sister ship to Bittell, Pacific. Surprisingly we had the locks all to ourselves and went up them in one and a half hours. Once up on the top level it was a straight run to Hawkesbury Junction where, as we turned the very tight left hand bend and into the 6" stop lock, I looked at my watch and found it saying 8.45pm! It was time to tie up for the night and try to get in the Greyhound pub for a meal.

Wednesday 23rd June. We set off at 9am heading due south on the Upper Oxford Canal. As we passed boats the odd one said "we've just seen your mate go through" - again I suspected they were talking about Pacific. As we approached the bottom lock at Hillmorton I looked behind me to see the hole in the bushes, made around 3 years ago when we spent two days digging out the Flying Scott from the

disused canal - that was a challenge! Just a couple of hours to go now before we reach our destination. The tall spire of Braunston Church came into view and as we approached Braunston Turn we caught up with Pacific, so both tugs came into Braunston Marina and tied up together. Bittell completed the trip in 30 hours doing 54 locks during the three hottest days of the year so far, with temperatures up to 25°. We drove back in one and a half hours!

Saturday 26th June. As I was driving back down to Braunston the radio was saying we could be in for the hottest weekend of the year with the temperature on Saturday hitting 27° and a promise of 29° for Sunday! But I shouldn't complain as only four months ago we were dealing with snow and ice.

Sagitta was sited at the back of the marina by the crane and dry dock, which was a good position to get the general public on and off the boat. This year was the turn of all the Grand Union Star Class boats to be moored up alongside each other in the marina. Bittell was moored on the main line of the Grand Union Canal at 'Tug Corner', where this year there were 13 tugs breasted up in 3 rows, with 4 out of the 5 Stewarts & Lloyds tugs all tied together. The total number of Historic Working Boats attending was 91, which is a record.



Bittell and the rest of the tugs went out on the morning boat parade. As we set off we made sure that the Stewarts & Lloyds tugs were in order with Algol (tug 2) leading, followed by Vesta (tug 3), Pacific (tug 4) and Bittell (tug 5) bringing up the rear. It was a shame that tug 1 failed to make the event as we would have had the complete set! Around 3 hours later we got back to our mooring. Meanwhile, on Sagitta, the rest of our team had been busy receiving visitors all day, with queues to see inside the now newly decorated (thanks to Della) boatmans cabin. Sunday 27th June. Singing was heard from the church service being held behind the beer tent and the bells rang out from Braunston Church, reminding us that it was Sunday morning and time to get up! We had a different team arrive to man the boats today. As the day wore on we noticed there was a definite lack of public around because of the England v Germany football match. During a quiet moment Tim Coghlan and David Blaygrove came over to Sagitta armed with a giant cheque for £200 which was donated to Dudley Canal Trust and was gratefully received. A good weekend was had by all with Sagitta receiving around 155 visitors on board over the two days. A big thank you to everybody from DCT who helped with this very popular event.

Steve Bingham



Photograph Steve Bingham

Prince The Boat Horse R.I.P.

On 1st June I received a phone call from Jane Bradley telling me that Prince had died. Prince was 20 years old and owned for most of his life by Jane. For 9 years he worked for the Black Country Living Museum before moving on to the Glass House Museum College in Stourbridge, working with Autistic Children.

Prince regularly attended our own biannual Parkhead Canal Festival, keeping the skills of horse boating alive by pulling a joey boat up and down Parkhead Locks. In 2008 Prince also participated in the DCI 150 Celebrations around the Dudley Canals which started at the Delph Locks in June where he was used to tow the butty Malus up and down the eight locks. Prince was one of the highlights of the grand finale at Netherton Tunnel which was 150 years old that year.

Prince will be missed by many who turned up at these events; our condolences go out to Jane.

Steve Bingham



Photograph Steve Bingham

Legging It

On Saturday 27th March firefighters and support staff from Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service joined together with Lichfield charity workers from Emmanuel Christian Centre to take part in a sponsored leg through the whole length of Dudley Tunnel to raise money for the burns unit at Ngwelezane Hospital in South Africa. The unit treats children and adults who have suffered burns as a result of accidents in the home, many of which are caused by cooking on open fires. Money is urgently needed to purchase modern surgical equipment for skin grafts and a specialist burns trolley to carry patients on arrival. Soft toys for children are also required so they can use their hands and prevent joints from becoming stiff.

The day started at 8.30am when the boats were prepared for the day. By 9am participants arrived with two press photographers to record the event. After a safety briefing by Melvyn Wright and Alex Parker from the canal trust we were ready to depart for the 1¾ mile journey to Parkhead.

We were towed through Lord Wards Tunnel and Castle Mill Basin to the Well where the hard work really began, no more sightseeing for people now! The boats were disconnected and, with the tunnel tug in front, slowly we made our way in the dark with the help of lights from the tug and torches. Once we got our rhythm we managed to move the boat at a good speed but we weren't fast enough to beat the record of 29 minutes set by Dudley Firefighters back in the 1970s. Dodging the iron oxide deposits and carefully navigating our way through the unlined sections we emerged at Parkhead in bright sunshine after legging through the tunnel in 1hr 10mins. Turning the tug round we re-entered the tunnel to return to the Tipton Portal. Boats and equipment were put away and we repaired to the Pie Factory at Tipton for some hearty food after all that legging.

A few days later we were pleased to find out that we had passed our target of £300 and had actually raised £450 through sponsorship! Thanks to all those who participated in the event, made arrangements for it to happen and especially to those who made donations.

James Brookes
0800 HFRC Technician for South Staffs



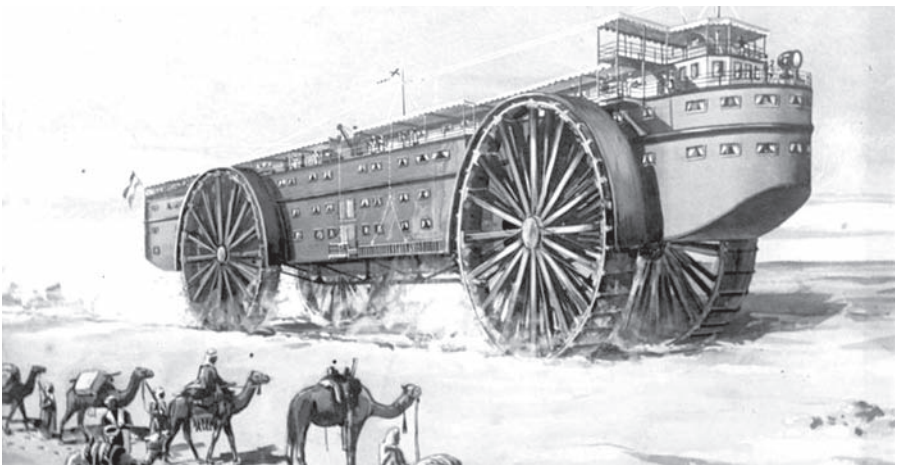
Photographs James Brookes

Chasewaterless

On 18th April 2010, a warm sunny day, I visited the Chasewater Transport Show, just outside Bloxwich on the A5. There were a lot of classic cars, model steam engines and static engines together with lorries and buses. There were a number of stalls selling a variety of items, such as clothing, plants and garden ornaments and various tombola stalls.

Taking a camera with me, I decided to take a photo of the empty reservoir, as it feeds the canals around the upper reaches of the Birmingham Canal Navigation system. As you can see by the photograph the reservoir is quite empty, with little water.

Roger Adams



Wüstenschiff (Ship Of The Desert) 1932. Courtesy of Deutsches Bundesarchiv

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