
The Stratford-upon-Avon Canal Society

Founded in 1956



NEWSLETTER

www.stratfordcanalsociety.org.uk



Autumn 2025

Issue 408

The Stratford-upon-Avon Canal Society

The objects of the Society are to promote the fullest use, maintenance and improvement of all Inland Waterways of Great Britain, and in particular the Stratford upon Avon Canal

Welcome to our meetings

Stratford upon Avon Canal Society meetings are held on the
3rd Thursday of the month from October to April

**Our meetings are held
at Amie's Tearoom, Birmingham Road,
Mappleborough Green, Studley, B80 7DF
Join us at 12 noon for a meal
with the meeting to follow at 2 p.m.**

There is ample parking. Admission to our meetings is £1 which includes a raffle ticket. Non members and guests are welcome.

Membership rates are still a minimum of only £10 a year
for any number of members living at the same address.

For membership go to our web site www.stratfordcanalsociety.org.uk
and download a membership form and bankers order.

Members details are held in strict accordance with the General Data Protection Act

For more information about the Society and it's activities visit
www.stratfordcanalsociety.org.uk

The Committee and Society may not agree with the opinions expressed in this Newsletter; we encourage the publication as a matter of interest. Nothing printed herein can be construed as policy or an official announcement unless it is so stated. The Society and Committee accept no liability whatsoever for any matter in the Newsletter.

Date for final contributions for the Winter issue 409 is 10th Nov.

Cover Photo: Bearley Aqueduct. Brenda Ward

Wanted. Seasonal cover photos for the Winter edition, please.

Small Ads, for sale or wanted, are welcome. Send details to Clive Henderson.

2024 SonACS Programme of Events

SonACS meetings resume 16th October

16th October

Phil Clayton

20th November

Swan Keeping

18th December

Christmas Dinner

Members and non members equally welcome

Unless otherwise stated, there is a £1 admission charge to SonACS meeting which includes a raffle ticket

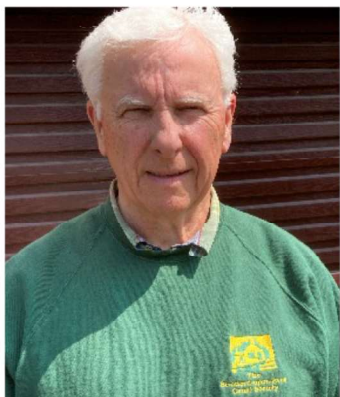
BCNS Meetings at Tifford Pumphouse, Oldbury. 7-30pm.
For full details of BCNS events visit www.bcn society.com

WB&DCS Meeting at Meeting room, Alvechurch Boating Centre, Scarfield Wharf. 7-45pm.
For information visit wbdc s.org.uk

IWA Warwickshire Meetings at The Sports Connection, Ryton-on-Dunsmore, 7-20pm. Bar open 7-00pm
Visit www.waterways.org.uk for local IWA activities

Workparties Towpath Taskforce
Stratford- 2nd Thursday, April - September 10am-3pm
Lapworth- 3rd Saturday each month 10am-3pm
Contact Steve on steve@3mph.co.uk

Please check with relevant societies web sites for their latest updates



Chairman's Letter

The very hot dry June early July was ideal for good boating and I hope you were able to take advantage. However as we all know now it has been the driest spring on record and this has brought water management issues.

It was reported that reservoirs across England were at their lowest level for a decade. North Yorkshire and the North West have already announced drought conditions.

The Stratford has not been affected yet, maybe due to the Lakes reservoir having been repaired and filled up a year ago and with little traffic on the southern part due to the repairs to the top lock at Wilmcote.

However in early July at Lapworth, some pounds were emptied either by accident or a malicious act of vandalism. CRT attended and refilled the pounds only to find them empty again the next morning. This stopped navigation for several days. Not a good thing to happen when water is short!! The top lock (L40) on the Wilmcote flight came back on line early July and CRT ran a "look at what we did" visit on the 22nd July. A number of local people went to hear what had been done which looks quite impressive. There have been a good number of boats passing through and the basin in Stratford is now busy again.

On the Birmingham and Worcester the top lock at Tardebigge is still out of action and has been since February. The current plan is for it to be back on line in August sometime.

These two long lock closures have really affected boaters particularly those wanting to do the Rings.

The Shirley Drawbridge has been hit again as usual by a vehicle hitting the barriers. CRT had to be in attendance but only there at 3:00 PM and 9:00 AM (22/07/25) to manually allow boats through. I did notice that the CRT reason given was classed interestingly as "Suspected Vandalism".

I notice there are no Stoppages planned for our canal this winter. Good news if we get a balmy Autumn as it will extend the cruising season and maybe make up for the long lock closures we have had.

The annual performance by the Mikron Theatre will again be at Bridge House next to Lock 2 on the north Stratford canal on Tuesday 19th August at 7pm. This year they will be performing their latest musical adventure to the Great British Seaside! They are a fantastic group and great to support. Hope to see you there.

Wishing you all good boating

John

Editors Ramblings

There seems to be so much publicity in the media recently about our canals and waterways. Some positive but it seems to me the majority one way or another is not. The biggest problem (apart from the perennial under funding) is the lack of rain. An exceptionally dry spring has been followed a summer of minimal rainfall with record breaking temperatures which has now seen unprecedented lock restrictions on many canals including the Caldon, Macclesfield, Peak Forest, South Oxford, Trent and Mersey, some of the BCN and parts of the Grand Union Canals and even the River Thames.



Almost dry CRT reservoir

It reminds me of a similar situation in 1976 when I managed Western Cruisers in Stratford when the canal was completely closed to navigation due to the hot and dry weather. We moved the fleet to the basin, set up a pump to backfill the basin and operated from there even using the pump-out machine in the Bancroft gardens, allowing our clients enjoy a cruise on the rivers Avon and Severn. This was in complete contrast to the following year when after a particularly heavy storm we had to wade up to our waists across fields to track down crews and ensure their safety!

All this doesn't mean that we can't enjoy our waterways with a peaceful walk along the towpath - at least it won't be muddy. Thanks again to our contributors for some interesting articles and I look forward to receiving reports for the Christmas issue. Has anyone a seasonal snowy scene for the front cover? Copy date 10th November.

Dusty



Buy bricks for Tardebigge Top Lock

Last week we launched a crowdfunding campaign asking for donations towards essential restoration and conservation work at Tardebigge Top Lock and we'd love your help in sharing the message far and wide.

Built in 1815, we want the public to help repair and restore the Grade II Listed Tardebigge Top Lock, part of the longest flight of locks in the UK, after one of its historic brick-built walls bowed and was at risk of collapse.

The restoration of the lock is needed to ensure this important piece of canal heritage is protected and for the continued safe passage of boats as well as for the thousands of walkers and cyclists who use the towpath and marvel at the locks each year.

Salvaging the historic lock

Having been in active service transporting boats for over 200 years, movement



in the ground adjacent to the lock caused one of its walls to bow meaning the lock and towpath have been closed since March. Specialist conservation teams, archaeologists and engineers have drained the lock of water and have been working to carefully dismantle the damaged section of

wall. The team has been focusing on cleaning and salvaging the original historic bricks so they can be reused as part of the restoration and ensure the lock's historic character is preserved.

As you may know, the Tardebigge flight of locks carries the Worcester & Birmingham Canal 220 feet uphill over two-and-a-quarter miles. With 30 locks, the Top Lock is particularly deep because it was the site of an 18th century experimental vertical boat lift before it was replaced with a conventional lock. The canal was originally used as transportation of porcelain pots and Cadbury's chocolate, and is now a popular route for boaters as it offers a route into the heart of Birmingham at Gas Street Basin.

Share our fundraising campaign

We're aiming to raise £10,000 to help towards the cost of these vital restoration works. Support from the public will go directly towards the work needed to carefully remove and clean the historic bricks as well as purchasing new bricks and the materials needed to rebuild the lock walls.

Emily Harris, senior project manager, said: "Tardebigge Locks is our longest canal lock flight and is a popular route for boaters and people wanting to explore their local canal. As a charity it's a privilege to maintain these centuries-old canals and locks and to keep them working for everyone to enjoy. The materials, skills and expertise required doesn't come cheap and we're asking people to help us fund these repairs and keep our amazing canal network open.

"Our canals are a national treasure. They matter not only to boaters and the local communities but to everyone else as well – because canals enhance the natural environment, they help to mitigate climate change, and they are integral to our future water security and supply. Emergency works like these at Tardebigge Lock highlight how vulnerable they can be, and how important it is that they are properly protected.

All the donations to this crowdfunder will be gratefully received and will make a difference to this important stretch of canal."

What a dire state of affairs !

Can it really get any worse than when the body that has the responsibility of our Nations waterways is so strapped for cash that it has to resort to crowd funding to restore a lock? This is not just a lock that is part of a number of cruising rings but is at a venue that was important to the history of the system. For here was where Tom Rolt moored Cressy while writing "Narrow Boat", the book that inspired the post war interest in our canals.

Not only that, it was where the first seeds of an organisation to fight for and to protect the waterways was born, - The Inland Waterways Association.

This dire state of affairs just emphasises the need for adequate funding and a prudent watch on how money is spent. If locks were kept full over the winter, the weight of the water would hold back the walls. This was the practice when lock keepers would fill a lock and "rack" the gates by throwing in some ashes above the bottom gates which would immediately stop leaks and seal the gates.



Tardibigge top in the distance where on the offside, Rolt moored during the war and wrote "Narrow Boat".

The Rippon Canal & It's Restoration

Part 2

John Reeve

At long last the reconstruction of the upper locks & restoration of the upper pound may soon happen. Some fund raising was started & a staged "plan of action" formulated.

In "part one" I described the "Principle promoter", Richard as a Civil Engineer. However, I do not think it was by University. More likely to have been via a Higher National Certificate alongside "hands on" work training. He was a "Building Trade Man".

That was an advantage as he still had contacts with his former tutors. Some now were on the "staff" of the Government's local Building Training Centre. He was able to enlist support to re-construct the locks. The agreement was thus,--- At an appropriate point in their training, under supervision, student would rebuild one or more of the lock walls.

However, before that could happen, the rubble had to be removed & the sites made safe. Following the visit of IWA Chairman, Ken Goodwin, and the project had IWA support. Also, I had spent a weekend with the IWA Waterways Recovery group. I met and befriended the Leader. The WRG agreed to prepare the sites for re-construction.

The immediate priority was to drain the sites & the intermediate pound. That could only be done by British Waterways by closing the sluice at the upper basin. Then a couple of weeks to allow the water to drain from the "top lock" site and the intermediate pound.

Then site clearance could be carried out by WRG volunteers. That done and a supply of suitable bricks secured, the rebuild or the lock walls could start. However, that was only when the trainee builders became available. So, progress was "slow but sure".

There was an agreement with BW Castleford that they would construct the gates provided the Society funded the purchase of the timber.

That left the most difficult problem, the replacement of the iron gate posts & floor "pingle plated". I suspect the originals suffer the same fate as millions of iron railings in the 1940's.

They were procured by the Minister of Supply. It was unlikely that the wooden patterns survived. However, Saint Aiden's Lock between Leeds & Castleford had been relocated. The work was carried out while the lock was still in service. Another was on the outer BCN. Both required new patterns. Maybe there was hope.

Some time passed in which the funds for the timber were raised. The search for pattern must have been a success. So, the new gates construction was started and the contract for iron posts and plates placed. Some months past, before the

ironware was delivered with a team from BW. They incorporated the posts into the brickwork. Then the plates to take the gate pingle pins. That done, it was back to the brick work. The "trainees" then built the lower wing walls before filling & compacting the voids left and right. I believe they also installed pipes to replace the bi-washes. Strips of concrete were laid, left and right and the bollards inserted or bolted. The lock was ready to fit the new gates.

The gates could have been transported from Castleford, all the way, by water. However, I suspect the gates were transferred by road to Boroughbridge. The lock at Linton was not reliable. Gates fitted and tested, it was time to remove the coffer dam. There remained the sluice in the basin to refill the canal. The locks were ready to commission and open to traffic.

By then I had become IWA NE Chairman and received an invitation to a "grand re-opening by Sir Lesley Young, Chairman of BW Board of Directors. It was to be on a summer Saturday afternoon.

On the appointed day, with my wife Janet, we drove to Rippon and parked at the Boat Club the crossed the canal to the tow path at the bottom of the lower lock. We joined the spectators from the Society and the public. At the appointed hour, a borrowed trip boat nosed out of the club Basin with Sir Lesley standing in the open bow scissors in hand.

The boat stopped at the open gates. Sir Lesley reached forward, cutting the stretched tape. Then, to a rousing cheer, the boat entered the lock.

Accompanied by another rousing cheer, the Skipper eased the boat into the lock. Willing hands closed the gates. Then the top gate paddles were raised with some caution. As a boat rose, for the first time for over 50 years, there were cheers "on board" and from the towpath.

The boat then sailed along the middle pound and into the waiting gates of the top lock. Ascending was a bit quicker. Then to the left into the top pound. Some of the onlookers followed the boat to the temporary basin. Janet and I retraced our steps down the locks and across to the M B Club House. We were soon joined by Sir Lesley and other principle guests that had shared the historic trip.

Sir Lesley led the speeches of congratulations while Richard Willis gave thanks to all that had helped the Society reconstruct the locks. Then a "buffet lunch" of sandwiches, cake, tea or coffee was served. After time to chat the guests stated leaving. Richard W approached me. Where was our car parked? On the Club car park I replied. Would I take Sir Lesley and his Lady to their car which was parked at the Racecourse? I agreed and was formally introduced. That led to a interesting conversation and an important contact for my IWA work. Then home-to reflect on a memorable day.

Shortly after I received an invitation to join the Society Committee. I accepted to invitation to help, in some part, the final phase of the restoration.

John



Fifty Years of Change

Ray Bower

For over Fifty years I have been boat moving by road transport and looking back I have been thinking about the changes in canal craft and their construction.



Most narrow-boats had wooden tops while many hire craft had GRP cabins usually with louvre windows. Then steel tops came in, not always the best design but better by being stronger and with far

less maintenance needed. From then on design changed with some quality builders producing craft with fine traditional lines while others built more basic boats at less cost. After 2000, wide beam boats had really started to be popular, London being the prime destination with most used as inner-city residential accommodation.

More boatyards had their own cranes to

service their own work, hull blacking, surveys, or as in

our case at Streethay Wharf, hull stretching where a boat was lengthened to give the owner more room without having to purchase a new craft.

The Continental transport of boats has slowed through rising transportation and ferry costs and increasing European regulations.

There are less real enthusiasts wanting traditionally styled boats with many new cus-



tomers having little interest in back cabins, engine rooms and traditional painting.

About three years ago the wide beam market started to collapse due to the soaring cost of mooring in London and popular cities, rising insurance prices, licence and finance charges and increased repair and maintenance bills. But the boat transport business is still very busy with fewer new craft but mostly second-hand boats going for re-furbishment to various specialist yards. The amazing thing is that hardly any boats go for scrap. They keep being repaired from one customer to another.



Ray



Spot Benda's "Deliberate" Mistake

At the end of the article about the cruises, I mentioned the changes at the Brandwood Tunnel entrance and got it wrong!! They are the opposite ends so the extra photo shows the opposite end to the photo with the launches!!! Ooops. Oh well we can't get everything correct!! I'll try harder next time.

Brenda

Did anyone spot the error? I must admit, I didn't Ed.



Brandwood Tunnel west portal



Brandwood Tunnel east portal

Photos: www.stratford-on-avoncanal.co.uk

How Watertight is the System?

Richard and Jackie Sanders from Mad Hatter

331 miles, 241 locks and 6 weeks

As most of the north of England is suffering through lack of water, we decided to go south to Brentford via the Grand Union and return up the Thames and the Oxford Canal. Before we set off Mad Hatter needed her bottom blacking at Kate Boats at Stockton, so we took her there before Easter. We set off on May 7th having received a warning that a Marsworth lock was out of action. We travelled hopefully, assuming it would be fixed by the time we reached it in a week's time.

The weather was a mixture of sunshine and a cold wind. Two days later I noticed the domestic alternator was not charging, so I used jump leads, so that the engine battery alternator was charging all the batteries. On the Stoke Bruerne flight we remembered that in the past water had flowed over many of the back gates as we descended, not so this time. In fact, when we got to the last pound the water level was at least a foot down



Low pound below Stoke Bruerne lock

and we ended up scraping the bottom during the transit.

Around Milton Keynes, the large number of moored boats slowed progress, but the variety of birdlife including greylag geese and hearing our first cuckoo compensated. We moored at Fenny Stratford, which would have been an ideal stopping place if we had wanted to visit Bletchley Park. At Soulbury, the second pound was very low despite being manned by volunteer lock keepers. We had identified Leighton Buzzard as a convenient place to leave Mad Hatter and return to Warwick for a medical appointment. As it turned out we were able to leave her at Wyvern Shipping boatyard to fix the alternator problem. The fault was found with a connection in the cupboard where we keep our mooring pins.

In the future we must be careful when taking or returning mooring pins. As we went further south, we noticed the number of broad beam boats increased, although seldom on the move – we only met three moving in the whole trip.

At Berkhamsted after visiting the castle we came across a lock which featured in a recent Robbie Cuming's episode. This was the Rising Sun lock which had been hit by a broad beam last year. The temporary fix was still in use. At Nash Mills, we came across another low pound which we had to re-water before proceeding. Local regular walkers said this was unusual, so we hope there was no permanent fault.

As we planned to return via the Thames, I had booked our passage through Brentford Thames lock for Saturday 24th May, which would give us a few days in Brentford to visit the Water and Steam Museum and Kew Gardens. But before then we had to descend the Hanwell locks. As on our previous visit we had to re-water the first pound as it was over a foot down. At Clitheroe lock we could not get level. A local boater said that this a well-known problem and helped with the aid of another passerby to force the top gate open. The next day a boater with a similar experience had to call out CRT, who having got him through then shut the lock when they found three holes in the cill. On arriving at the Gauging locks, there were no moorings free, so with the agreement of the volunteer lock keepers we moored initially at the top of the locks and then on the pontoon below. If you are able to moor at Brentford then there are many worthwhile

places to visit including The Musical Museum, Kew Gardens and the Museum of Water and Steam. Brentford is also steeped in history as the monument outside the town hall testifies: 54 BC – attempt to prevent Julius Caesar fording the river, 780 King Offa held council near here, 1016 Edmund Ironside drove Cnut across the Thames and in 1646 there was a civil war battle here. We were joined by three other boats on our journey to Teddington locks where we then waited with a number rowing fours for a lock to be readied. There is only one lock in operation at the moment; the launch lock has been awaiting repairs for over a year. On the wider open waters of the Thames the effect of the winds was more noticeable, even though it did not affect navigation it was uncomfortable for the boaters. Moorings where they were chargeable were easy to come by with



Temporary repaired balance beam



Brentford Monument



Fours in Teddington
Barge lock

a cost between £5 and £15 a night. Some engineering changes were evident at the locks approaching Reading. We needed to go home again, but there were no suitable moorings in Reading and Caversham, but we struck lucky at Caversham Boat Services on the island of Fry. As long as we were happy to stay put from 17:30 until morning all was Ok. We would probably have been advised to refuel the boat as the choice of boatyards above Reading is limited. Many of the locks were Self Service which meant both of us being involved in securing Mad Hatter in the lock before operating the push buttons. At Abingdon, we had arranged to meet two lots

of friends so were pleased to moor on Abbey Park with easy access to the town and a supermarket. We would have liked to have stopped at Osney, but the East Street moorings are closed, so we carried on to Eynsham. Moorings on the upper Thames are normally on meadows and the majority on high banks, not suitable for those advancing in years. Those at Rushey and Lechlade fitted the bill with lower banks. Unfortunately at Lechlade, cows are keen on boats, so the pansies on the roof needed hiding and even the fender ropes are a target. One cow removed a fender and caused the captain to stub his toe on a wooden peg while chasing the cow across the field. On the return journey to Oxford, we decided to have a pump-out at Eynsham. EA Pump-outs cost £13, those on the canal more expensive. However, the machine was faulty, and the lock keeper was away so another was called to relieve us. We moored at King's Lock and the next morning operated the lock and then tried to do the same at Godstow. However the automated system would not work so we were forced to use the wheels to raise the paddles and open the gates. Fortunately the automation then woke up and completed the job. Duke's Cut has officially been closed for some time – it can take a long time to fill. As it is some time since we used Isis lock we went that way and met an acquaintance by the now defunct sliding bridge.

At Thrupp we received the news that



Old Father Thames, Lechlade

Grants lock was closed due to a broken balance beam and an update would not be given till the day we were due to reach it. As we had planned to restock in Banbury we travelled in hope and visited the boatyard in Lower Heyford to get some local knowledge. On the day of the update, I phoned this boatyard who were able to tell us that CRT would be providing 'Assisted Passage' through Grants lock between 10:00 and 12:00 each day. As it was already 09:15 and Grants lock was at least three hours

away we set off expecting to join the queue for the following day. As it happened CRT and their volunteers committed to staying till 14:00, so we were 'assisted'

through and successfully restocked at Banbury. The next day, the pound between Bourton lock and Slat Mill lock was low, but we were able to creep through. On the outskirts of Cropredy, we encountered half a dozen canoeists a foretaste of the many we met near the marina. Claydon flight was in water, thanks to the partial open paddles at the top lock. The work continues on HS2, both on the Oxford canal summit and near Welsh Road lock on the Grand Union. One last surprise, after descending Bascote staircase we came across another shallow pound and only ventured across when a CRT employee assured us that we would be OK. The weather had now changed so that we were pleased to complete our trip before the really hot weather arrived.



Boat high and dry below Pigeons lock

Our general impression is that preventive maintenance is not getting done, so the system is reliant on emergency repairs, making for uncertain passage. In fact since returning many lock flights have their hours restricted because of the lack of water.

Richard and Jackie



The Major Work at Wilmcote Top

After six months of closure Wilmcote top lock was reopened for traffic allowing boats once more to visit Stratford, a favourite destination on possibly the most popular cruising route.

On 22nd July CRT invited locals and canal society members to inspect the work that has been carried out. I was explained that the wall holding the quoin had moved inwards at an angle consequently jamming the gate. A comprehensive solution was devised which is probably more substantial and longer lasting than when originally built over 200 years ago.

(Many of the canal's problems have derived due to the days of dereliction and that the Southern section, as it progressed further south, was built on an increasingly tighter budget. Due to inflation and spiraling costs the original canal company ran out of money several times and had to issue more shares to raise the capital to complete the line to Stratford and the standard of



construction was compromised.) It took two months to produce a plan of action before work could start. Owing to the remote location equipment had to be brought in over farmland on a track-way. Where the usual method to remove and fit gates is to use a large tripod and pulley, it was not possible here due to the unstable state of the lock and a crane had to be brought in.

After the gate was removed the task of removing the quoin and lower wall was begun, not made any easier by a telegraph pole which it seems the GPO were unwilling to remove, necessitating driving piles down to several metres to keep the land stable. The old wall and spoil was dug out to a depth that uncovered the original Wilmcote stone foundations which were found to be in excellent condition. The





new quoins were made, from red sandstone as were the originals and the new wall built from hard blue and red Staffordshire brick backed with concrete blocks and concrete, tied back to the piling. The whole job was finished off with a brand new gate and lock rounder.



From the Stratford Herald Canal reopens- only to close immediately

The Stratford Herald, 17th July, reported that boaters and traders barely had time to celebrate the canal reopening, before it was closed again almost immediately.

As reported in these pages, the canal had been closed at Wilmcote while a "problem with one of the lock gates was fixed" as the Herald somewhat understatedly put it.

Soon after CRT reopened the canal in what looks like a deliberate act of vandalism, paddles were opened and locks and pounds were drained. A spokesperson for CRT said, "We've had to deal with some localised vandalism with people opening paddles and draining locks which is adding to the pressure on our precious water supply.



A Walk on the (Almost) Wild Side

Jane Birkett

As we approach September and into Autumn its hard to believe we're near the end of the year again. Its been a very hot summer, with little rain and

today, as I write, its 32°C. Too hot for me, the wildlife and nature struggles as they too, are not used to it. The seasons are ahead as well. We have seen ripe apples, pears and plums. Blackberries are ripe and juicy. Some not so plump, as the lack of water has kept them small. Water levels are low and also on the canals and waterways. Several

canals have restrictions already. And in our garden, my little hawthorn bush has bright red berries. I worry how the birds and wildlife will fare, if all the fruit and berries are gone by the end of September. So, along the canals, waterways and country lanes we can see our early Autumn bounty. Glossy, purple elderberries, a great source of Vitamin C and perfect for treating winter coughs and colds. Always need to be cooked first, never eat them raw. It will upset your tum! Blackberries, as mentioned above, are about but not as plump as they could be. Hawthorn berries, with their glorious range of colours from pale orange, bright red, to



the deepest purple. This beautiful bush or tree is full of frothy white flowers in May, hence its old name; 'May Blossom' or just 'May'. It is good for balancing low or high blood pressure. Hawthorn is a great circulatory tonic, improving blood circulation and this is why its so good for the heart. (However, care if on any blood pressure or heart medication). It is good for treating anxiety and stress. Probably because it helps with the circulatory system, easing the 'flow' around the body. And one of the main causes of diseases is 'stress'.

Hawthorn Brandy:

500g Hawthorn berries 750ml bottle brandy 100g soft brown sugar Extras (optional): cinnamon stick, a few cloves, grated zest of orange or lemon, a grating of nutmeg Crush the berries a little, in a 'pestle and mortar', or with a potato masher. Place into a Kilner jar or wide mouthed jar (sterilised first). Add the brandy, sugar and spices. Seal,

label and store in a cool dark place for a about 8 weeks or so. Shake every so often, or when you remember! Sometimes the brandy can be a little solid as the berries can have a large pectin content (especially if picked after a frost!) If this happens, add a little more brandy and give a good shake. Strain, the brandy through fine muslin. Keep in a cool, dark place for as long as possible. It really is lovely! Add a little hot water for those winter ails. Hawthorn Berries

A berry that we can all recognise (well, I hope you can!!) is blackberries. I do feel so sorry for this amazing plant! We can all get cross with the brambles that trip us up or catch on clothing or are in the way on towpaths and footpaths. However, its an amazing plant. Used as a natural barrier; before barbed wire and electric fencing. It protects small birds and animals from larger prey. It also protects young saplings from grazing animals. The young leaves and shoots are good for tummy problems and diarrhoea. Pick and chew a few or make into a tea. The berries themselves are full of Vitamin C and antioxidants (protects cells and tissues from damage). You could make jam, syrup or cordial from these lovely berries. And wine, don't forget!

Blackberry and Raspberry Oxymel - an Oxymel is an equal mix of honey and vinegar. Originally from the Middle East. So a standard mix would be 2 teaspoons of vinegar to 2 teaspoons of honey. However, using cider vinegar (especially organic) brings another health benefit to these lovely recipes.

200g fresh Blackberries 200g fresh Raspberries (if no fresh available, frozen is equally good) Organic cider vinegar Equal amount of honey. Fill a large jar with the fruit. Add an equal amount of brandy to honey. Seal and leave in a cool, dark place for about 4 weeks. Strain, keeping the vinegar. Use as a dressing. Make into a drink by adding old water or hot water. It is cooling in cold water and great for coughs, colds and sore throats, made into a hot drink, Other herbs can be used in an Oxymel. I make one with Sage and Thyme, great for sore throats, coughs and colds. So, hopefully the weather will be cooling a little, when the magazine arrives through your letterbox. Walk along the waterways, canal towpaths or just out in the countryside. And as always, IF UNSURE, DON'T PICK!!

Disclaimer The information contained within this article should be used for educational purposes only. When picking in the wild please follow the Country Code. Make sure you have permission of the landowner, pick respectfully and sparingly, leaving plenty for wildlife and birds. Avoid areas where dogs may have soiled and any polluted areas. Always thank Mother Nature for her bounty.

Jane



The Wharfinger

This year has been a pretty poor year for many in the UK, particularly those enterprises which are affected by climate change.

Farmers, for example, are particularly unfortunate - a business model that relies on crop or milk yields is sorely tried by long periods of strong sunshine and lack of expected rainfall. Some pastoral farms are beginning to use winter feed stores for cattle, to the detriment of such feed supply later in the year.

Canal and River Trust is also seriously affected by the hot weather, and this is especially bad for boating. Suddenly, all the leaking gates and culverts assume a terrible importance, and maintenance that has been postponed, sometimes for years, has come home to roost. Anyone who has watched the travails, often self inflicted, of Robbie Cummings in his 'Canal Boat Diaries', (BBC 2 and U&Yesterday), will note that he goes through many locks that leak like the proverbial sieve, sometimes through lock walls as well. There is a severe lack of knowledge about

how to hang lock gates, and seal them adequately, in CRT's contractors.

A more serious example is the condition of Maisemore Weir on the Severn, which is breaking up. The trust says it has been monitoring the spillway for two



years, but if the usual 'fix-on-fail' methodology is followed, it will be more difficult to repair when water levels return to normal, and in the meantime there is the risk of flooding.

Even when maintenance happens, it takes an unconscionably long time. Lock 40 at Wilmcote was closed on the 24 January this year, so closing the very popular Avon Ring. It was finally re-opened on June 20th, five months later! It's rumoured to have cost to raise the question of CRT being 'sold a pup' when the condition of its operational assets was assessed when BW was privatised in 2012. It seems unlikely that the serious concrete failure of the spillway would occur in only 6 - 7 years.

All this is not helped by the Government Grant agreement announced by the faintly ridiculous Thérèse Coffey on 10th July 2023, (just 11 days before the Summer recess, so avoiding embarrassing Parliamentary scrutiny), which is £400m from 2027 - 2037, tapered from £50m to £31.5m over the 10 years. This is not inflation linked, so we can safely deduce that the managed decline of the system will continue and increased licence fees will be the norm for even longer stoppages, worse services and fewer, poorer facilities. And no amount of Crowdfunding and pleading for bequests will make much difference to that!

The Wharfinger



**Canal &
River Trust**
Making life better by water

*** STOP PRESS * STOP PRESS ***

We have continued to monitor the exceptionally dry conditions, and the impact on our reservoirs. Unfortunately, despite all our operational efforts to reduce the demand for water we've seen a rapid decline in water levels. To materially improve the situation will require a prolonged period of wet weather which is not currently forecast.

To help us conserve water and maintain safety, we have unfortunately had to make the difficult decision to introduce further restrictions ahead of a full closure in parts of the network.

We will be adjusting lock operations as follows:

From Friday 15th August we will be increasing restrictions and locks will be open between 10am and 3pm (see stoppage and notice system for details of last entry)

From Tuesday 26th August we will be moving to a full closure of all locks listed below

Grand Union Canal

Radford Bottom Lock 23. Calcutt Lock 1. Braunston Locks 1–6
Buckby Locks 7–13. Stoke Bruerne Locks 14–20

Oxford Canal

Hawkesbury Stop Lock. Hillmorton Locks 1–3. Napton Lock 8.
Marston Doles Lock 15

Coventry Canal

Glascote Bottom Lock. Atherstone Lock

During the closure, boaters will still be able to cruise along pounds between winding holes

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**There are now vacancies on the
committee**

**Please send items for the Newsletter to The Editor by
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