
The Stratford-upon-Avon Canal Society

Founded in 1956



NEWSLETTER

www.stratfordcanalsociety.org.uk



Christmas 2025

Issue 409

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 Spring issue 410 is 21st Feb.

Cover Photo: A chilly winter scene at lock number two.

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



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

2024 SonACS Programme of Events

18th December



See page 13 for the menu

16th January Navigating the Fenland Drains Richard Sanders
19th February Trees on the Landscape Nigel Bishop
19th March TBC
16th April AGM CRT what we've done this winter TBC

Members and non members equally welcome

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

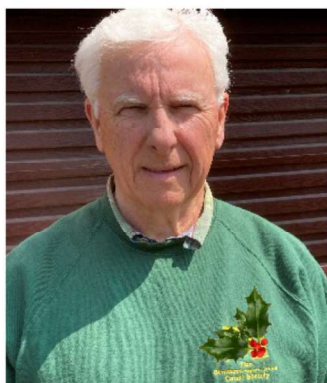
BCNS Meetings at Tifford Pumphouse, Oldbury. 7-30pm.
For full details of BCNS events visit www.bcnsociety.com

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

Hope you all managed to get some boating in during the summer months in spite of the drought restrictions. The weather was excellent. CRT said that 20% of the network was closed during August this year. This compares to 15% in 2024.

We still haven't had enough rain yet and the northwest and Yorkshire are still under drought controls and may be for some time. Maybe the

tail end of hurricane Melissa will bring some rain over to us.

Jill and I recently went to a CRT Midland Customer Forum and saw various presentations by the leads of the CRT teams. One presentation was by a CRT Principal Hydrologist. As well as giving an update on the summer he talked about the issues around the licences in place for extracting water from rivers and reservoirs many of which are not under CRT control.

These licences impose limits and conditions on abstractions with compliance and enforcement conditions. Future drought conditions will present CRT with a real challenge.

I am hoping he will be coming to talk to us and also cover the plan to use the canals to "transport" water down the country. I believe there is a public CRT meeting planned, via Zoom, in December on this.

It would be nice to see more of you at our meetings. We are trying to have some good speakers talking on a range of subjects and it would be nice to see more of you there.

The last talk was by the CRT project manager for the Wilmcote top lock work accompanied by the CRT lead engineer on the project.

It was a big job and the canal was closed for about 6 months. The job required extensive restoration work on the original fabric of the lock and the repairs required to the gate and quoins. You should all have seen a copy of presentation.

We have an excellent arrangement at Amie's for our meetings for which she creates a special menu at a reasonable price. I therefore encourage you come along and keep in touch with others who also have an interest in the Stratford.

Try and get all the jobs done on your boat before Christmas as you know they will not get done in the colder winter weather in the new year.

A happy Christmas to everyone.

John



Editors Ramblings

This has been a strange year. Despite the glorious weather, it has been a bad one for boating with virtually a complete shut-down of the system. I feel sad for the hire boat companies whose revenue must have been drastically diminished. I reminds me of the drought in 1976 when I was managing Western Cruisers in Stratford. The Southern Section was then administered on a shoestring by The National Trust who relied on BW for the water supply which was inefficient for navigation. Fortunately we were able to operate on the Avon from the Basin with the help of a large and noisy back pump. Just for fun, how many sprigs of holly can you find within the pages of Newsletter. Answer on page 21. May I wish all our members a very happy and healthy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Dusty



Caption Competition

A small prize might be found for the funniest or most wittiest caption sent to the editor by the end of the year.



Swallow Cruisers The early Years 1968-1987

Brenda Ward

This story again started with a photo that I found while looking for something else. It triggered my imagination and I needed to know more about it.



The photo that led me to this article is dated 1970 and was found in CRT Archive, showing the bridge over the entrance to a short arm leading to the Wharf public house in Hockley Heath. I couldn't understand why it said SWALLOW CRUISERS over the bridge hole and thought it was an advert for Swallow Cruisers just down the canal at bridge 27. I was wrong! This is where this boat business first started.

I put this photo on Facebook and Paul Ringrose, son of the man who first started Swallow Cruisers in 1968 sent me a message along with the explanation of how his father started this business and progressed over 20 years.

John Ringrose started hiring small cruisers almost as a hobby at weekends while still at work and it eventually grew into a business he called Swallow Cruisers and that has become the one we know today.



Photo: John Ringrose 1968 - rear of The Wharf, Hockley Heath.

Here is the quote from his son Paul:-

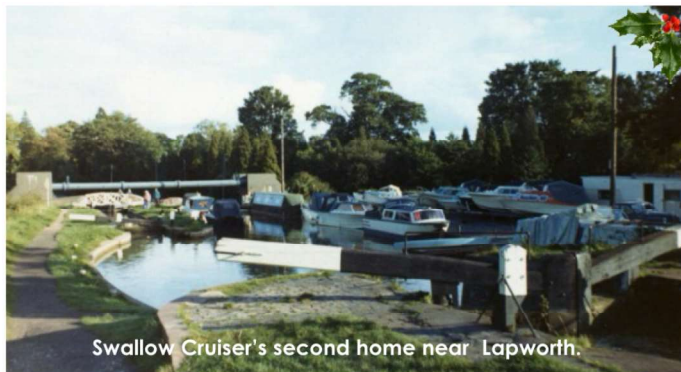
"The "business" Swallow Cruisers boats was established in 1968 by the late John Ringrose, my father. The Wharf public house in Hockley Heath, West Midlands which lies on the Stratford upon Avon canal was the first site chosen by John after striking a deal with the brewery to rent redundant land adjacent to the pub with canalside access. Working as a tailor in Rackhams Department Store in Birmingham at that time, John devoted his weekends to hiring out 2 small cabin cruisers for Saturday/Sunday afternoon cruises. Later, after building a 300 metre scaffold landing stage along the canal, John turned to boat sales and moorings. The business grew and gradually the

redundant land grew from one small caravan as a sales office into a working boatyard. By 1971 Swallow Cruisers needed bigger premises and being the astute businessman that he was, John cut a deal with the then British Waterways board to rent land at the rear of The Boot inn Lapworth halfway down the Lapworth flight of locks. This new site allowed John a much larger sales pitch whilst still retaining the moorings at The Wharf. The boatyard continued to grow through the 1970s until in 1978 it was relocated to its current home in Wharf lane Lapworth - on the site of the old Hollwill's boatyard/Bourne yachts. John retired in 1987 and sold the boatyard that he had built over the past 20 years."

John was obviously very serious about making the business, that he called Swallow Cruisers, a success and he took it to the Boat Show in Bingley Hall in Birmingham. It was the first purpose-built exhibition hall in Great Britain, built in 1850 and burned down in 1984. The International Convention Centre now stands on the site.
Photo: Swallow Cruisers exhibiting at The Boat Show at Bingley Hall



The business must have really taken off from the Exhibition so bigger premises were required. First at the side of Lapworth locks near The Boot Inn as Paul explained. The Boat Show must have been a big expense but was obviously worth it and even the stress that it must have caused.



Swallow Cruiser's second home near Lapworth.

Then as the boat sales increased in number John moved his business to its final premises in Wharf Lane where it has been run by Alasdair & Hannah Lawrance for more than 30 years and that is

another story!! I must add here a tribute to the success that John Ringrose made of Swallow Cruisers, during the 20 years, in these few words about him from his son, Paul:

"The boatyard was a constant bustling hub of activity as I remember with

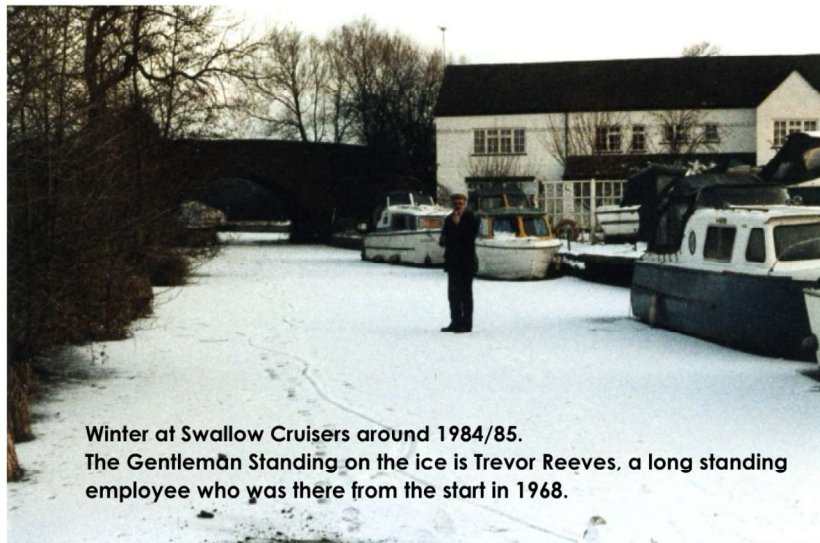
a steady stream of surrounding business owners, residents, navigation workers and employees. It was a regular social club and many laughs were had, usually at someone's expense. John was very well known in the area in the 70s/80s and was respected and liked as he was a very friendly and generous person. T total but loved his Players Navy Cut and his cups of



Swallow Cruiser's final home at Wharf Lane 1980s

tea. I'm certain that his personality was a huge plus in the success of the business, a perfect gentleman and businessman yet "one of the lads" who loved to get his hands dirty. A proper Yorkshireman (born in Leeds)"

All photos except the first one have been supplied by Paul Ringrose.



Winter at Swallow Cruisers around 1984/85.
The Gentleman Standing on the ice is Trevor Reeves, a long standing employee who was there from the start in 1968.

Brenda





Owing to a technical issue (blame it on my new computer) A paragraph was missed from the Wharfinger's Autumn article. To put the article in context we reprint it in full.

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 nearly £1m pounds, but, of course, no such information is available from CRT.

David Hutchings must be spinning....

It still, obviously, made the Avon Ring impassable, because Tardebigge Top Lock was closed on February 17th, with a rumoured opening date of August 29th, so closed for 6 months bar a couple of weeks. While it is true that Listed Building consent had to be sought, it does make the Wharfinger wonder why it takes so long to complete these repairs. These locks were built with (certainly a lot of) manual labour and wheelbarrows; what has changed?

In short the Avon Ring will have been impassable for just over seven months, a severe detriment to all boaters, Boat Hire firms and canalside businesses.

Leaving those two examples aside, there is a serious problem here. CRT is spending heavily on implementing the requirements of the Reservoir Acts, partly as a result of the problems at Whaley Bridge, (the Toddbrook Reservoir spillway) in 2019. The rebuild and repairs were originally costed at about £15m, then £37.6m in February, 2023, and will certainly have increased since then. (£50m in the 2024 Annual Report). It would seem 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



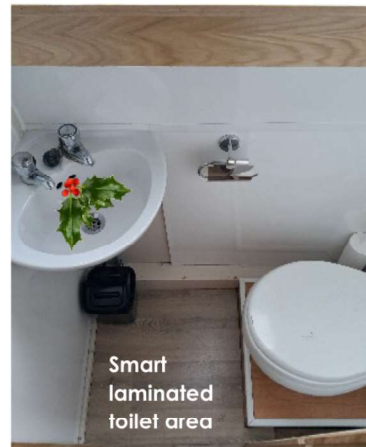
Centenary - An Update

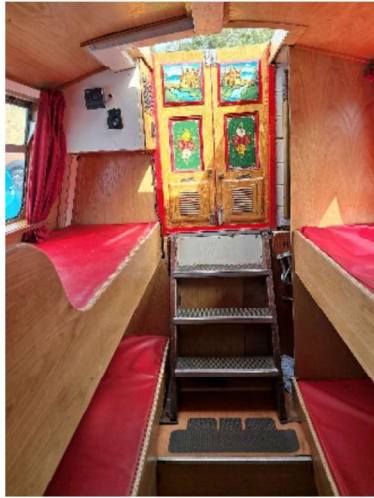
Most readers of Newsletter will have heard of the narrowboat Centenary but just to recap she was presented to the young people of Stratford by the local branch of Marks and Spencer during their one hundredth year in 1984. Each M&S branch took part in a project for their local community.

Originally managed by a board of Trustees from M&S, local dignitaries and business people the boat ran from Western Cruisers offering time away on the canal for Stratford's young people which included the local Youth Club, Scouts and Guides. With the changes in M&S management they no longer have any interest in the project and the boat is run by an independent board of voluntary trustees. Your editor has been involved almost from the beginning, firstly as a trainer for youth leaders but for the last twenty something years as chairman. We are now looking for people to join us in running the boat.

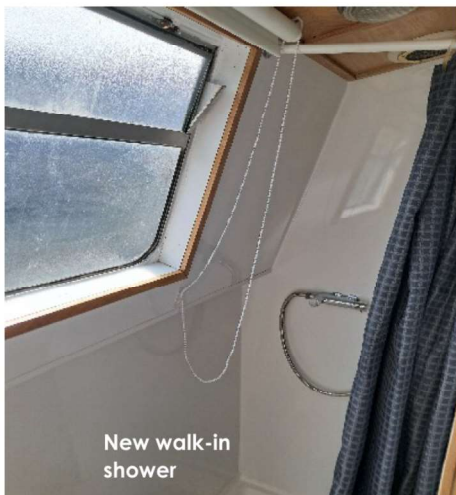
As reported in these pages, during lock-down we raised money for a new bottom and various steelwork repairs, then at the end of the '23 season it was decided to take the boat out of commission for a year for a major interior refit. £30,000 was raised in grants and the work entrusted to Calcutt Boats, from where in future she will be based, which due to unforeseen circumstances ran into the '24 season and had only one hiring before water shortage closures caused the cancellation of the other summer bookings.

With a new smart and modern looking interior we look forward to a successful 2026.

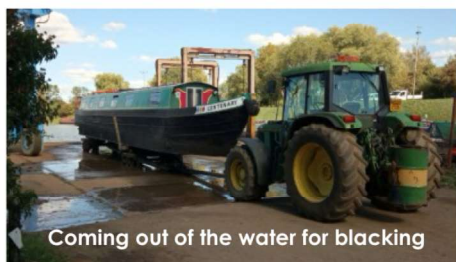




Four berth, single
bunk cabin at the
fore end and left
at the stern



New walk-in
shower



Coming out of the water for blacking



Light oak finish
throughout

Society Christmas Lunch

Don't forget to book your place
and let Alasdair know your choice from the menu



The Rippon Canal & It's Restoration

Part 3 Lock Opening to Completion John Reeve

I attended my first meeting during the September following the Lock opening. First on the agenda was finance. It was very healthy. To money raised locally and a 50% Lottery Fund Grant had been added a second 50%. That would put the funds into surplus. A very happy situation.

Investigation was under way to detect any services buried under the blocking road before placing the contract for its removal. Towpath work was to be carried out, over the last 80 yards to establish Visitor Moorings. The Builders, occupying the basin were to relocate. They would then refurbish the house, back to a residence "for let". Then bring the Stables area back into use. They were "not listed" and so could be "taken down and replaced by new facilities. We left the meeting in a very optimistic mood.

However, that optimism was soon tempered by caution. From nearby Northallerton, the County Council Highways, announced it was to construct a Ripon Relief Road to address congestion in and through the City. That was good news. However, the proposed route was along the abandoned railway track to the east of the city. That crossed the bridge spanning the canal a short distance from the basin. No plans were yet issued and so, it was wise, to await until we had sight of the plans before placing a contract to complete the project.

It took a couple of months before they were issued. A call from Ripon Council was the first indication of trouble. It spelt disaster for the canal project,

The spanning bridge and its embankments were gone. In their place was a roundabout. It was to bury the canal for about 30 yards. Dotted lines indicated a piped culvert. The universal response was of devastation and anger.

The C C were aware of the importance of the project to Ripon Council and all who had worked or contributed to the project over many years. A "council of war" was called. As well as the Canal Society, senior officers from Ripon Council, Harrogate District and British Waterway attended to represent the Statute Authorities. Also a senior representative from the Boat Club. A joint response was formulated, rejecting the plan as issued and making a strong case for continuing to "bridge" the canal and Boroughbridge Road. That was signed by all and sent to C C Highways.

Fortunately they accepted the rejection and agreed to revisit that part

of the plan. It was a few months before "plan 2" was issued. This had a replacement bridge and a relocated roundabout. The plan was accepted. The contract to remove the blocking road was placed and work commenced. Visitor moorings were established just before the Basin entrance. The Builder was to re-locate and they would then refurbish the house and re-develop the stables to the benefit of the Ripon community.

Though the work to complete the project was soon complete, it was a couple of years to the official opening to the basin. The area around the bridging became a busy "work place". Boaters had to be content to continue to moor in the temporary basin.

A very handsome bridge completed, it was time for the official opening of the completed restoration project. The ceremony was to be at the basin. The "honour" was to be Mr David Curry the MP for Ripon and Richmond. A plaque was mounted on the outer wall of the basin enclosure. My Wife, Janet and I parked our car nearby. It gave us the opportunity to view the small business units and above apartments that replaced the stables.

As earlier, the official party came up the locks from the Boat Club. A speech of thanks from Richard Willis. on behalf of the Society. A speech by David Curry followed by him drawing the curtain to reveal the plaque. Lots of applause followed by happy relaxed "chat" with some relief. Despite the difficulties caused by the unexpected Relief Road project. TOGETHER, WE HAD SUCCEEDED!!!!.

John



Photo: Niall Homer. Wikimedia Commons



Why Bother?

John Brookes

I was looking through some old files and found this from, I think, 2003. I'm not even sure it was ever submitted for the newsletter then, but thought it might be of interest for you to publish as a 'look back to past articles' but with the question, 'has anything changed since then?'

Why Bother? The Stratford upon Avon Canal Society has come along way in the last forty years and I for one have derived a great deal of pleasure from being a member. Much of my satisfaction has been due to my involvement as a committee member, a position that I have held continuously since 1985 in a number of guises and I hope I can claim to have made a difference to the condition of our canal and the output of the Society to its members, albeit in a small way. I have certainly made many friends. I have never been involved in active canal restoration and, other than helping restore Manchuria and clip a few trees and brambles here and there, I have done little physical work on the Stratford upon Avon or any other Canal. Neither am I keen on politics and, other than a few civic events, most of my 'work' has been in organising internal activities, providing entertainment, planning gatherings, etc. which is what I do best (not to mention cooking looking after the books for over ten years and, previously, arranging the monthly programmes). Oh, and I have also found plenty of time to do a few miles up and down the canal by boat, on foot and (dare I say it) also on a bike. I may be wrong but, from what I can see of the present membership, there is little interest in the politics surrounding the canal, little interest in physical work on the track (not that we are allowed to do much now anyway) and the majority of members do not want to change the format of the Society's social activities. Most members who come to monthly meetings seem happy with the tried and tested format of canal related slide shows and the occasional social gathering and it would appear that the perceived apathy felt by the committee is simply a resistance to change, because most people are happy with things the way they are. If I am right, this situation is fine for those already involved, but this format is unlikely to attract many new members. Younger people do not live in a world of clubs and societies meeting in village halls. Their lives revolve around sport, public bars, TV screens and the Internet, aimed at providing a diversion from the real problems in life, such as finding and keeping a job or affording a mortgage. Thinking for recreation is becoming rare and, even for the diminishing number who actually care about our waterway heritage

and want to know more, there is no need to leave home when you can experience the virtual reality of canals on TV or by typing in the necessary buzz words into "Google" or other appropriate Internet search engines. Lets face it, to go and sit with a load of 'anoraks' in a place with no alcohol and no 'street cred' isn't exactly socialising is it? And at weekends who wants to go and hang around an old canal? Even if the scenery is pleasant, normal people can't afford a boat these days and who would want one anyway when it is so slow and much quicker and easier to get there by car. I suppose you could go walking, but that's only done for exercise and if you have to keep fit then its much more convenient to visit the gym, go jogging or, perhaps don your lycra suit and get out your latest state of the art mountain bike. The latter may, of course incorporate some (mountainous?) canal towpaths, but there's little time to look around – too busy dodging fishermen, mooring pins, unsupervised toddlers and stray dogs. So why bother? There is obviously no long-term future for any society like ours and we should probably just wind it up and keep the Friday meetings going as a social club for those who want it. There would be no need then for anyone to feel that to comment may result in being pounced on to take office - no real need for a committee even. The ideal solution! What do you think? By the way – any volunteers to organise the meetings? Oh and do we still want a magazine? What about a dinner?

John

John raises a very valid point when attendance at our meetings has dwindled to about a dozen stalwarts. The meeting nights were changed to a Thursday to fit in with the requirements of the Navigation Inn at Wooton Wawen which before closing decided that our custom was no longer appreciated despite 20 to 30 meals being consumed. We then changed to midday meetings to avoid driving in the dark winter months and to another venue which turned out to be unsuitable and we now meet at Amies where there is room for plenty more than attend and the menu and food is good although if the attendance depletes any more will Amie be able to provide an exclusive and varied menu just for us?

But to increase attendance and to attract new members who are not retired and cannot make daytime meetings, should we revert back to evenings especially now that both Mary Arden's in Wilmcote and The Navigation at Wooton are now and opened under new management? Your opinions and suggestions will be vital to the future of this, one of the oldest and most successful canal societies. Comments to the Editor please.



More on the Wilmcote Lock Work

In the Autumn issue we reported on a presentation by CRT on the island of Wilmcote lock, number 40 about the work that had taken place there to rectify a moving wall and jammed gate. At our October meeting Alex and Adam from CRT came to give us a detailed report on the whys, and how's of the operation. Unfortunately on the day a projector was unavailable but now they have forwarded photographs which clearly show the magnitude of the £900,000 task.



Temporary Works

- Temporary works constraints – limited space (approx. 5m) towpath side between wall and boundary hedge/tree line, water pipe to cottage, SCADA apparatus and telecom pole at Towpath back verge
- Kier installed row of heavy-duty piles approx. 2m from lock wall face driven to below invert level and propped off offside wall to enable wall take down/excavation and to support telecom pole



Wall Take Down

- Wall including quoin stones taken down to failure point
- Stable wall including bottom two quoin stones left in-situ
- Cast iron quoin broke, bottom part left in-situ and new steel quoin designed



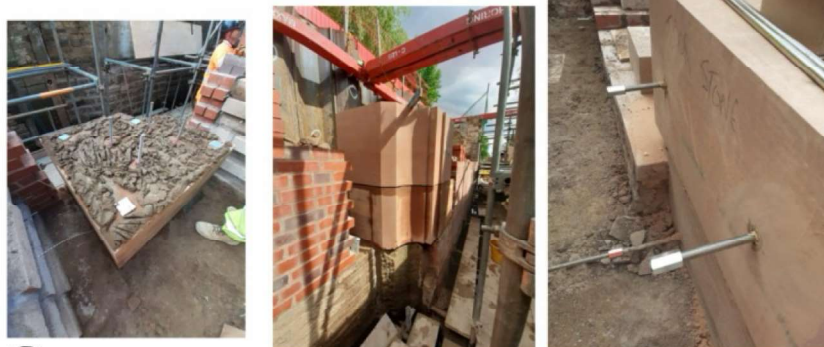
- Even rebate cut in quoin stones left in-situ
- Brick facing – Concrete blocks



- Concrete backfill and pile tops cut off



- 5 New quoin stones including anchor stone
- Dowels between stones and ties to piles



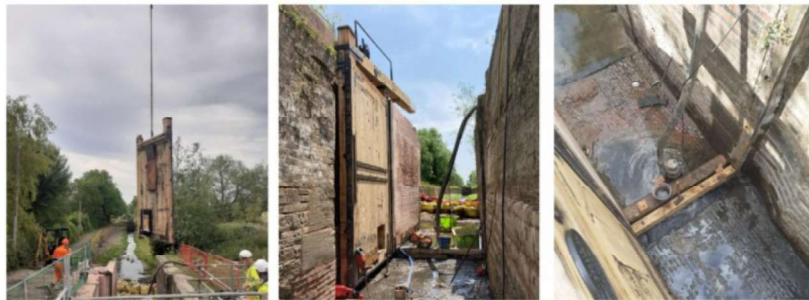
Wall Rebuild – Finished Wall

- Wall rebuild complete and scaffolding removed



New Gate

- Direct Services fitted new gate and clap cill.



Lock Site Reinstated

- Site reinstated – Quadrant rebuilt, Topsoil at lock sides, tarmac towpath reinstated, SCADA Lock counter



The Starn End

+ STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS +
From Swallow Cruisers

The Canal & River Trust are undertaking a comprehensive dredging (called 'Capital' dredging, as opposed to 'Spot' dredging), starting on Wednesday 12th November.

It's the first large scale operation of its type in the 36 years we've been at Swallow Cruisers and the contractors, Ebsford, will base themselves at Swallow Cruisers, using the yard and wharf as well as our car park and field.

There will be plant arriving by road from November 10th onwards so there will be an unusual amount of heavy traffic during the week following. After that less so, but there will be sealed, (ie non-dripping), lorries taking the dredgings for treatment during the weekdays until the end of January '26. There should be no more than two per day, but that might change. There will be a two week break for Christmas/New Year. The works start at Kings Norton and move towards us in January. The whole operation should be completed by mid-February.

We intend giving a full report on this notable operation in the next issue.

There are 21 sprigs of holly hidden in these pages.



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The Stratford-upon-Avon Canal Society COMMITTEE

Chairman

John Philps

Cruck Cottage, 4 Old School Lane
Wilmcote
STRATFORD ON AVON CV37 9UZ
01789 290525
john.philps@btinternet.com

Secretary

Steve Hayes

31 Western Hill Close
Astwood Bank
Redditch
B96 6BY

Treasurer

Helen Henderson

The Bridge House, Church Lane,
Lapworth,
SOLIHULL B94 5NU
01564 783672
Helen.henderson1@outlook.com

Membership Secretary

Clive Henderson

The Bridge House, Church Lane
Lapworth,
SOLIHULL B94 5NU
01564 783672
07836 523118
Clive.henderson3@btinternet.com

Programme Secretary

Vacant

Newsletter Editor

Dusty Miller

3 Furze Hill, London Road,
SHIPSTON ON STOUR
CV36 4EP
01608 661274
07976 755732
brassokid@gmail.com

Mike Bleby

Lilac Cottage, Old Warwick Road
Lapworth
SOLIHULL B94 6AP

Meeting Venue Co-ordinator

Alasdair Lawrence

Wareside House, Wharf Lane,
Lapworth, SOLIHULL B94 5NR
01564 783766

Society Web Site

www.stratfordcanalsociety.org.uk

Web Master

Steve Hayes

Hon. Auditor

Hannah Lawrence

**There are now vacancies on the
committee**

**Please send items for the Newsletter to The Editor by
e-mail or post. Thank you.**

SWALLOW CRUISERS

At bridge 27 on the Stratford Canal

CHANDLERY NOW OPEN

for all your

**NARROWBOAT AND CRUISER
EQUIPMENT**



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