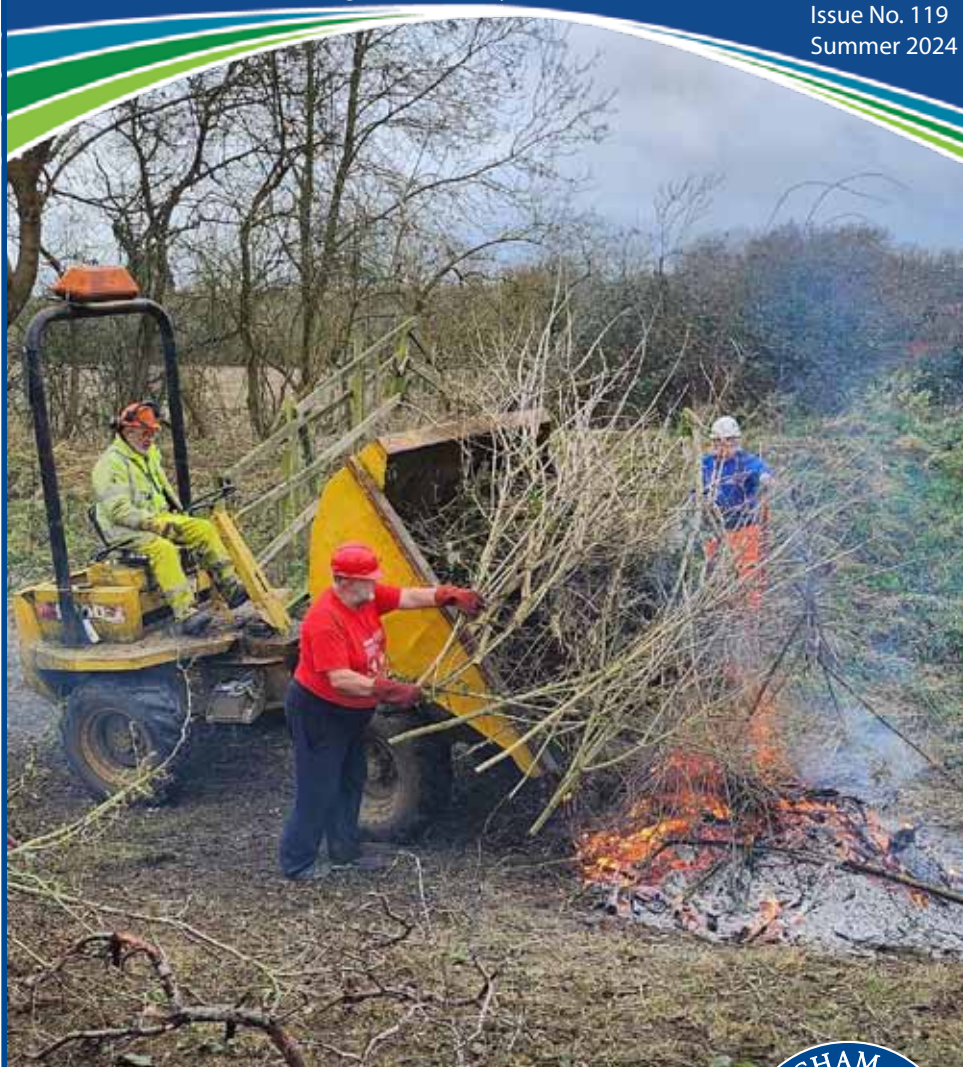


THE BUCKINGHAM NAVIGATOR

The Newsletter of Buckingham Canal Society

Registered Charity No. 1156662

Issue No. 119
Summer 2024



Featuring:

- Huge Progress at the WRG Christmas Camp
- BCS Appears on BBC Countryfile TV Show
- Two More Wildlife Firsts at Bourton Meadow



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Buckingham Canal Society's work to restore the waterway to Buckingham

Please re-use this publication which incorporates a variety of information about some of our activities, to promote the work of the Buckingham Canal Society to a friend / neighbour / colleague / relative or other interested people.

Editorial



Welcome to the Summer 2024 edition of The Buckingham Navigator.

I must sincerely apologise, as due to ongoing personal circumstances, I had to make the difficult decision to scrap the Spring edition and create a 'bumper' Summer edition, which itself wasn't easy. Thank you for bearing with me, and I hope you will be totally absorbed in the brilliantly written and wide ranging articles and the accompanying photographs from all the contributors, be they regular or newbies to these pages! Enjoy!

Cover photo of the Waterway Recovery Group Christmas Camp clearing the canal bed at Cosgrove toward the A5 © Terry Cavender. **See page 18 for Tim Coghlan's full report.** Thank you to all the contributors.

Why not drop me an email about what you enjoyed in this issue, and furthermore, why not contribute ideas or articles for future editions (see page 33). In addition to our website, we now have a wide social media presence:

Please visit our website at: www.buckinghamcanal.org.uk

Follow/Like us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/buckinghamcanalsociety

Reach us on X at: www.twitter.com/bcsocietyuk

Find us on Instagram at: www.instagram.com/buckinghamcanalsociety

Watch us on YouTube at: www.youtube.com/buckinghamcanalsociety

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Ian Matson
Editor

In This Issue

- | | |
|---|---|
| 4 Restoration Site Update | 29 Our Publicity & Recycling Stall Needs You |
| 9 Health & Safety Refresher | 30 Funders |
| 10 Buckingham Canal Society News | 30 Patrons, Partners & Supporters |
| 12 Our Website Has Had a Makeover. Again! | 31 Corporate Members |
| 15 BBC Countryfile Team Films BCS in Action | 31 Corporate & External Volunteer Groups |
| 17 2024 Cosgrove Canal Festival & Craft Fair | 32 Future Events |
| 18 On the Second Day of Christmas... | 32 Win Big with Buckinghamshire Lottery |
| 22 To Boldly Go... | 33 Work Party Dates 2024/2025 |
| 24 The Winter & Spring Wildlife Report | 33 Next Navigator |
| 27 Meet the Committee | 34 Contact the Committee |
| 28 Buckingham Canal Society Craft Group | |

Restoration Site Update



Up.

© Alan Mynard

We Dredge it Here, We Dredge it There

We have commenced the dredging at Cosgrove to ready the rewatered section for moored boats (**opposite**). As part of this we are cascading the training to other members of our team. Diana the dredger is working well despite challenges when the canal was frozen. We also have to consider safety when high winds are predicted, as well as the welfare of our team in very cold weather. Once the dredging is completed, we aim to allow boats to moor along the arm on the A5 side of Bridge No.1.



Canal & River Trust are also working with us to help identify spot dredging targets at Cosgrove on the main canal, and our team will be out surveying the depth of the canal and then removing material as agreed with the Canal & River Trust team (**above**). A similar approach will be taken to key 'challenges' between Cosgrove and Braunston when Diana will travel northwards to attend the Rally & Canal Festival at Braunston in June.

If any of you want to help with the dredging or boat moves etc, then please get in touch using my contact details on page 34.

Piling, Narrows and Beyond

The piling continues at Cosgrove after a few mechanical challenges with some of our plant. Next up is to work on the other side of the farm crossing. This is where a land drain crossing the canal which was installed by the farmer in the 1980's requires replacement, along with repairs to the canal bed and sides. The design work has been done and reviewed with senior engineers at Canal & River Trust, who in turn have approved it.

This will see a collection chamber for the landfill water created and pumped into the canal using solar power. Students on work experience will be helping create this, which will then enable the rewatering of section two to a depth that allows the farm crossing by the narrows to remain in use. We will then need to reinstate the bank at both of the farm crossings, ready to fully rewater that section.

Waterway Recovery Group Christmas Camp

The A5 end of the canal saw some amazing work by a team of Waterway Recovery Group volunteers at Christmas alongside some of our own folk (**below**). The work they undertook involved clearing the canal bed. **More details can be found in Tim Coghlan's article on page 18.** We offer our grateful thanks for the collective effort as always.



Terry Cavender

Trustee and Executive Officer

A Huge Thank You For All of Your Help Throughout 2023

First of all, I want to thank all of our own volunteers who have helped me over the last twelve months. You've been invaluable at the various work parties I have run, and have helped on my Publicity & Recycling Stall and at the Cosgrove Canal Festival & Craft Fair.

We have also had an amazing amount of work carried out by external volunteer groups taking part in their 'team building' and 'volunteer' days in 2023. With a record number of thirty-three visits taking place last year, bookings had already started for 2024 by January!

The companies who joined us last year were: Mitie Group plc, Network Rail, Ingram Micro, Santander, Cranfield University, BayWa r.e. UK Ltd, Galliford Try Holdings plc, The Coca-Cola Company, The British Standards Institution, Studio B2, Senceive Ltd, NHBC and Audi UK (**opposite, top at Bourton Meadow on 9th November**).



All Eyes Turn to Restoration Efforts at Cosgrove, Mostly

A great deal of the work at Bourton Meadow was carried out last year, but things have started to grow again so we are back again on site to carry out the regular tasks there.

In the period at the start of the 2024 the group of conservation volunteers were helping the Cosgrove team and working at our Cosgrove site on Sundays for a few months. This was until things had started growing again at Bourton Meadow and we had to return there.

Over the Christmas period we held a very successful Christmas Camp with Waterway Recovery Group near Cosgrove working at the A5 end of the canal (**see full article on page 18**). However, whilst all the foliage was cut back from the canal bed, because of the bad weather conditions some of the saplings and brambles which had been cut back still needed to be cleared from the bed. This is the work being carried out by my volunteers and is going well, allowing our teams to have a few great bonfires!

We have also had children taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme joining us on our Sunday work parties at Cosgrove. This has proved to be a great success, with the parents getting very interested in what we do and telling their friends about the work parties. On Thursday 9th May we had our first corporate volunteer group of the year joining us at Bourton Meadow.

Accessibility Issues at Hyde Lane

Unfortunately, this site has become very overgrown because of the actions of a local farmer. Our work parties have been working at this site for over eighteen years with no problems, but the local farmer has suddenly withdrawn access to the site. This means that for several months we have been unable to work at the Buckingham Canal Nature Reserve at Hyde Lane, and with the recent storms taking down several trees (**page 8, top left**), we had not been able to deal with them and unblock the towpath.



© Athina Beckett



© Athina Beckett

We have recently solved the access problem by using the Society's van to drop people off at a public footpath (**above, right**) which helps us get to site, but this is far from an ideal. A lot of brambles and foliage which was beginning to destroy the brickwork inside the lock chamber have been removed. We had hoped to start re-pointing some of the brickwork in the lock, but with the access problems this has not been possible. However, work will continue here to keep this site in good condition over the next few months.

BCS Joins The Conservation Volunteers Green Gym Scheme



Green Gym was set up about twenty-five years ago by two GPs who felt that giving people the opportunity to work outside in the fresh air and carry out conservation and environmental work would help some people recover more quickly and improve their health rather than just taking pills. With that in mind, the Green Gym system was started and has proven to be very successful since its inception.

At a committee meeting on Thursday 2nd May it was agreed that Buckingham Canal Society would set up its own Green Gym. The Society's group of conservation volunteers would now become part of a new Green Gym. The committee felt this would be a great way of marketing our practical tasks held on alternative Thursdays and on the second Sunday of each month. After all, it's a much cheaper way of getting fit than paying a fee at a regular gym, and a great way of giving something back to the environment whilst making friends.

Our marketing team will be asked to promote our new Green Gym. **We are always looking for more volunteers, so if any of the above interests you please page 9 for details.**

Athina Beckett

Trustee, Volunteer Leader and Work Party Organiser

Do You Dig Canals?...We Do!



Work parties are now held every Tuesday, Thursday and the second Sunday of each month and are always friendly, welcoming and very rewarding. Most Tuesdays and Thursdays, as well as the second Sunday of each month will take place at Cosgrove. Some of the other dates will be at Bourton Meadow or Hyde Lane.

Further information can be found on page 33, and more detailed information about these and extra curricular dates can be found by visiting our work parties web page at:

www.buckinghamcanal.org.uk/events-and-news/work-parties/

If you would like to become involved, please contact either myself or Terry using our contact details on page 34.

Athina Beckett

Trustee, Volunteer Leader and Work Party Organiser

Health & Safety Refresher

Buckingham Canal Society has a duty of care to its members, volunteers and the public to comply with the Health & Safety legislations in place.

Buckingham Canal Society operates work parties under terms of Insurance provided through the Inland Waterways Association. As a part of this, we work within many of the principles and methods of Waterway Recovery Group.

You will always be given a Health & Safety briefing for any work party. All work parties involving construction machinery, often referred to as plant, will require that you confirm you have watched the Waterway Recovery Group's Health & Safety video (via the link below) within the past twelve months.

Waterway Recovery Group's Health & Safety video contains important Health & Safety information that all new volunteers need to know. All volunteers are required to watch the Waterway Recovery Group Health & Safety video before they go on site. Please watch the video to find out about Waterway Recovery Group's on site Health & Safety.

This video is only an introduction to site safety, and does not remove the need for a volunteer to have a full briefing about a specific site/project.

For full details of the Waterway Recovery Group's Health & Safety policy along with additional documentation and other important videos, please visit:

www.buckinghamcanal.org.uk/wrg-health-safety-video/

For more information about Waterway Recovery Group, please visit:

www.waterways.org.uk/wrg

Buckingham Canal Society News

The 2024 Annual General Meeting & Social Evening



On Saturday 2nd March we held our 32nd Annual General Meeting in Buckingham Community Centre. We started setting up displays at around 6pm to give visitors an idea of what we have been up to in recent months, whilst waiting for the meeting to start. It was called to order at 7.35pm, and we made a start.

As we are currently without a chairperson, Terry Cavender **(left, 2nd from left)** took the

role of presenter of the Trustees Report. There were four new trustees present, to replace the four that had resigned since last year. Each trustee introduced themselves. We now have two husband and wife couples, Steve and Mandy Morley, with Ruth Millard joining husband Gerry, who is already a trustee. The fourth is Paul Rodgers, who some may know through his involvement with the Inland Waterways Association.



Terry gave a brief overview of what had happened in the last twelve months and what might happen in the next twelve and beyond. He also paid tribute to two original members of Buckingham Canal Society who were in the audience, Mike Freeman and Helene Hill. Terry then set about working through the published agenda. This included acceptance of the previous AGM minutes, the annual accounts and the formal acceptance of the new trustees. With no resolutions, members questions or any other business, the formal part of the meeting was closed.

There followed a break for refreshments and socialising, followed by a talk by our invited speaker (**opposite, bottom**). This year it was Nick Lake, Chairman of 'Friends of Raymond', the last wooden working narrow boat. Nick gave a very interesting insight into the difficulties and practicalities of maintaining and operating such a boat.

Originally launched in 1958 at Braunston, it started life transporting coal and in later life became a trip boat. During those sixty-plus years it has required substantial restoration, especially after spending time under the water rather than on it.

If you would like more details on Raymond and companion motor Nutfield, you will find them on the Friends of Raymond website at www.friendsofraymond.org.uk.

The evening closed with the usual raffle, after which all that was left to do was thank everyone for attending and clearing up.

For those not in attendance, you can find the annual report and account on our website at www.buckinghamcanal.org.uk.

Richard Dwight
Trustee and Treasurer

Another Step Closer to Going Under the A5

The great news is that just before Christmas we had confirmation from National Highways that the proposal to cross under the A5 is considered viable following work they commissioned from engineers at Atkins. The proposal now awaits the next round of internal funding at National Highways and will be revisited late in 2024 to see what the revised criteria from HM Treasury is when they revise 'The Green Book'. Our contacts at National Highways remain optimistic that the next round of funding can lead to the channel under the A5 being built by National Highways for us!

We Welcome Four...Yes Four New Trustees!

We welcome Paul Rodgers, Mandy Morley, Steve Morley and Ruth Millard as trustees who were all co-opted at our meeting in January. They stood for election at our AGM in March, **of which the full report can be found opposite on page 10.**

Terry Cavender
Trustee and Executive Officer

Our Website Has Had a Makeover. Again!



The initial Buckingham Canal Society website (**left**) was released to the world sometime around 2003. By today's standards though, it was very basic. But so was every website at that time. Google and Amazon were only just becoming well known and Facebook didn't even exist then. Mobile phones were just that: phones! The site was constructed by Tony Collins with the help of the MK Heritage Association (who I believe may have hosted it for us).

During the next few years small additions were made, and in about 2007 extra content was added leading to the addition of a menu section down the left hand side of the page.

The end of 2012 saw a completely new website design and new content (**right**). The World Wide Web had advanced considerably over the preceding decade and websites had become much more important as a point of contact and information. An external designer/implementer had been commissioned to move the website from



its existing hosting service and to give it a much more up-to-date look. Committee members spend a lot of time creating new content with details of our history, current projects, future plans etc... The new design incorporated a rolling news section where 'posts' could be added at regular intervals with the latest news. For the technically minded, the underlying implementation of the website changed from being ad-hoc, self-created, to using Wordpress, a platform in use by tens of thousands of websites.

It was about this time that I stepped in as the maintainer of the site: the webmaster! My profession was a computer software engineer and, amongst other things, implementer of web applications. One of the first technical changes I made to the site was to make it 'mobile friendly'. The use of phones and tablets as devices for accessing the web had escalated considerably and it was now important to have a version of our site that could be easily viewed on such devices. The first version of this was almost a completely separate website. It would attempt to detect what sort of device was being used and then present the user with the 'desktop' or 'mobile' (**right**) view. There were links on the page allowing you to select the alternate site in case the auto-detection got it wrong.

Late 2019 saw the next change. Visually it appeared to be mostly cosmetic: some tweaks to the top-menu, but it incorporated a number of technical advances. No longer was there a separate mobile and desktop version, but the internals could automatically adjust the way the pages were displayed so as to fit any device and even adjust itself when a phone or table is changed between landscape and portrait mode. We also introduced views of our Facebook and Twitter feed onto the home page: over the preceding years these social media platforms had become the primary source of up-to-date news from the Society, rather than the website itself.

And so now we come completely up-to-date (for the time being). The new site (**overleaf**), launched over the new year 2023-2024, is at the moment mostly technical and cosmetic changes to give it a much more modern appearance. Over the coming months we will be re-working most of the content. Our aim to improve Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). This relates to the algorithms that search engines like Google and Bing use to bring you results when you search for something. At one time people came to our site by typing in the web address (www.buckinghamcanal.org.uk). Now though, most websites are accessed via a search query. The aim of SEO is to ensure that when certain keywords are typed into a search engine, Buckingham Canal Society's own website is one of these near the top of the results.





Life By The Canal

Nurturing our environment for a brighter future

Get Involved >

Volunteering

Donate

Membership

Shop

Restoring Canal Heritage

From Cosgrove to Bourton Meadow, our members and volunteers are regularly contributing their time and effort to improve the canal restoration process. Using our calendar, you can choose a day that fits right into your schedule where you can lend a hand to ensure that our canal is restored on time

Explore our Calendar >



There's a really interesting resource on the web called the "Way Back Machine" hosted on the Internet Archive: www.archive.org. It's one of those not for profit organisations, like Wikipedia, that provide a free public service and rely on donations to keep going. In this case, they take snapshots of websites from all over the world at multiple points in time. You select the site you want to know about and then choose from all the dated snapshots. Try it with your favourite website. It's fascinating to see how they have evolved over the years. Most of the images of our website used in this article have come from this service.

Alan Mynard

Website Administrator and Archivist

BBC Countryfile Team Films BCS in Action

A film crew from the BBC's Countryfile rural affairs TV show was filming Richard Parry (Chief Executive of Canal & River Trust) at Stoke Bruerne in the morning and was due to come to Cosgrove in the afternoon. We were on standby to carry out dredging with our workboat Diana to demonstrate the capabilities of volunteers, or some such.

The first task was to bring the hopper along the Buckingham Arm from the Cosgrove Junction at the Grand Union. This was achieved by punting with poles. These had been purchased for the purpose, and with Terry's usual eye for safeguarding the Society's money, stair rails were much more economical than boat poles from a chandlery. The reason for manual operation was that Canal & River Trust had 'borrowed back' Shoveler, our tug that we have on long term loan from them for repair work at Stoke Bruerne.

Not so quick was starting Diana, as the battery didn't have enough juice to turn the engine (it was fine when we left it last time!). A spare battery was even worse, but one removed from workboat Perseverance did the trick. Then there was a total loss of steering, caused by a complete lack of hydraulic oil in the steering box. Once a suitable funnel was located, and a container to decant the hydraulic oil from a large barrel, this too was rectified. The hopper was brought alongside Diana through Bridge No.1, and a suitable position taken up ready for demonstrating some dredging (**below**).

It was then a case of sitting around and waiting for the film crew who were, predictably, running late. All this time it had been raining on and off, and by the time they arrived it was decidedly inclement. However, filming was set up, with the operation filmed from the bank and then with the cameraman behind me as I operated the controls. It had been suggested that the presenter would have a go at dredging but apparently this had been vetoed on health and safety grounds.

Dredging was then suspended while Terry was interviewed and the rain continued to pour down. It seemed that Countryfile were producing a special edition on the canals and it will be interesting to see the finished product. Apparently Anna the show's director was impressed with our input and suggested we won't end up on the cutting room floor. **It turns out we didn't, and by the time this goes to print, the TV show will have aired on 3rd March, but if you missed it, you can still watch it on the BBC iPlayer. It can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001x0yq or on the iPlayer app, and is titled**



'Pontcysyllte Canal'. So, perhaps stardom and red carpets await us... well if you believe that...

Steve Morley
Trustee

For more
information



COSGROVE CANAL FESTIVAL & CRAFT FAIR

Saturday 20 - Sunday 21 JUL 2024

• Historic Boats • Trade Boats • Cake Stalls • Craft Stalls • Games • Entertainment

This event is organised by the Buckingham Canal Society to raise awareness and funding for the restoration of the Buckingham Arm of the Grand Union Canal.
Latest information and plans will be on display at the festival

 buckinghamcanal.org.uk
 events@buckinghamcanal.org.uk

Fund raising for Charitable Incorporated Organisation Registered Charity Number 1156662

2024 Cosgrove Canal Festival & Craft Fair

Anchoring Back Into Town With a Splash

Mark your calendars, friends! The highly anticipated Cosgrove Canal Festival & Craft Fair is making its triumphant return on the 20th and 21st of July 2024. Get ready to join us for a weekend filled with excitement, entertainment, and plenty of treasures to discover!

Last year's festival was a roaring success, and this year, we're aiming to raise the bar even higher. Picture this: a vibrant parade of boats, including beloved favourites like The Beer Boat and Captain Cheddar painting the canal with a kaleidoscope of colours. The air will be buzzing with laughter and camaraderie as friends and families come together to celebrate our rich heritage.

But that's not all. BRMG Radio will be joining us again to stream the event live and conduct captivating interviews, adding an extra layer of excitement to the festivities. And let's not forget the charming The Friends of Raymond and their historic boat that adds a touch of nostalgia to our waters. You will have an opportunity to venture into Cosgrove Village Hall and discover a treasure trove of goods from talented crafts vendors. From handmade jewellery to intricate artwork, there's something for everyone to admire and take home as a memento of this unforgettable weekend.

This year, we've received an overwhelming response from traders eager to be part of the festivities. We really have had our work cut out to accommodate as many of the participants as possible, ensuring that all the successful applicants have a chance to showcase their wares and join in the fun. But wait, there's even more! Beyond the hustle and bustle of buying and selling, we've lined up live bands to keep you grooving to the rhythm, and our legendary and mouthwatering traditional fish and chips supper to round off the evening in style.

Excited? Then drop us an email at events@buckinghamcanal.org.uk and let us steer you in the right direction. Get ready to immerse yourself in the magic of the Cosgrove Canal Festival & Craft Fair - we can't wait to see you there!

Edima Inwang

Trustee and Marketing Manager

As in previous years we will be holding a Craft Fair in Cosgrove Village Hall. There will be over twenty stalls selling unique and handmade items made by talented artisans. No two stalls will be the same! We will also have boho clothes, a Wicca stall, a Henna tattoo artist and a large stash of craft items. You can feast on home cooked food and cakes while drinking refreshments, and make use of the loos too. So why not pop in and take a look at all the lovely things for sale. It promises to be a feast for both your eyes and tummy!

Sharron Comerford

Craft Fair Organiser

On the Second Day of Christmas...

...My True Love Sent to Me

Yes, the joy-to-the-world Christmas present you always wanted! Five days of winter canal restoration work, volunteering at the Waterways Recovery Group camp on the derelict Buckingham Canal. And to make it more festive, mustering on Boxing Day afternoon and departing on New Years Day morning, thus avoiding any post-Christmas encounters with those family and friends you would rather prefer to avoid.

Instead, you had the challenge of three hundred metres of canal bed and towpath **(right)** to clear in those five days, comprising trees and scrub vegetation, which had grown wild and probably hadn't been touched since the canal was abandoned in about 1935.



Joining you would be the jolly company of twenty-seven other Wergies (Waterway Recovery Group (WRG) volunteers). Their average age for this camp was sixty, reflective of our ageing volunteer population. And eight of them were women, four of whom came with their husbands. So, some scope perhaps for mistletoe adventures!

For the modest sum of £60 (yes you had to pay) you were allocated a bunk bed (bring your own bedding) and two full meals and one snack meal a day. Accommodation was provided in the scout building at the canalside village of Cosgrove on the Grand Union Canal. The bunks were in four dormitories, two all-male, one all-female, and one mixed – married couples only! Two couples had brought their own campervans where they slept, but otherwise joined in for meals and evening socialising. After tea and beer time, there were board games, nattering, or we'd head on down to the Barley Mow Inn.

The scout building came with two showers, and there was an ample supply of hot water for the volunteers. And given the time of year, the building had very welcome underfloor heating throughout. I was told by Jenny Hodson, the Inland Waterways Association (IWA) Volunteers Coordinator who took me round the work site, that these volunteers had much better accommodation here than at most WRG camps, which mainly involved taking over village halls and sleeping on the floor, unless you brought your own camp bed. She had sixteen of these camps planned for 2024, right across the waterways, and with no shortage of volunteers. She and her team were also looking seriously at doing another three - so rumours that the IWA was dead in the water seemed somewhat exaggerated!

Two of the volunteers acted as cooks - one male and one female. With twenty-eight mouths to feed three times a day, then washing up and shopping, it was a pretty full time job. The

night before my visit, the cooks had served home cooked lasagna with garlic bread, and apple crumble and custard to follow. A magician couldn't have made it vanish faster - just like that.

The WRG plan was to work outside from dawn till dusk, in the bleak mid-winter, and regardless of the wind and weather. Only one half-day was in fact lost, due to the atrocious weather experienced that first afternoon. In light rain the Wergies just carried on. The official onsite start time was 9am, with tools down at 3pm - provided the light was still safe enough for working the Buckingham Canal Society's vintage dumper truck, and the assortment of petrol driven chainsaws, strimmers, cutters, and the like. Work was pre or proceeded by a half mile walk to the site, with the Wergies carrying their hand tools. The wheelbarrows provided were only for large heavier tools.



© Tim Coghlan

A short midday break was held, with the two volunteer cooks bringing down Thermoses of nutritious homemade soup and sandwiches. All day long, the London WRG BURCO tea urn (**left**) was on the go, for volunteers to help themselves when a job was finished and a cuppa was called for. The joke was, "What's a WRG urn?"

On our arrival at the scout building, we met up with Terry Cavender, the

dynamic CEO of the Buckingham Canal Society's restoration project. Terry then walked us across the large field on the other side of the road down to the line of the former canal. He told us that the top end of that field, close to the main Milton Keynes to Northampton road, had now been sold for modern warehousing, with the planning gain including substantial help with the canal restoration project. This would help fund the building of a new canal, the diversion, which was now necessary because the canal had been cut in the 1960s by the upgraded A5 road from the new town of Milton Keynes to Towcester.

Due to the topography of the route, the canal diversion would drop down eleven metres by two pairs of staircase locks. It would then pass under the A5 by an enlarged existing culvert linked to the River Great Ouse; then lock up by three locks to rejoin the original canal line for the remaining eight or so miles to Buckingham. A right of access over the land at no cost had already been agreed with the generous landowner and property developer, Pete Winkleman, Chairman of MK Dons Football Club. Beyond the A5 the canal is then in open country and relatively free of obstructions. Terry was hopeful that the full restoration would be completed within ten years. I told him I just might have my wish - to live to see this!

Our next stop on Terry's tour was at Bridge No.2, which had been much reduced in height over the years to take heavy farm-machinery. Whilst it did not block the canal itself, its lowered bridge-hole would now impede any navigation under it. The problem had already

been addressed with the restored Bridge No.1 which was rebuilt by volunteers, but no decision had yet been reached as to what type of bridge should be built here. However, the pressure was now on to sort out Bridge No.2, as the canal was already back in water, however shallow, all the way to the Grand Union Canal. With Diana the Dredger now in action, navigation right up to it could soon be in place, opening up a whole mile of restored canal.

At Bridge No.2, Terry introduced us to Jenny, who would show us her Wergies-in-action. They had only been at it for three and half days, but already well over two-hundred metres of trees and vegetation had been cleared from the dry canal and the towpath, revealing the old canal bed **(above)**. Trees on the non-canal edge of the towpath and the non-towpath side had been pruned, and where dead or diseased they had been removed. It was already starting to look like a canal.



©Tim Coghlan



©Tim Coghlan

Where possible, trees and branches had then been cut into logs **(left)**, to be given villagers and the live-aboard boaters on the canal at the Grand Union end, who had been so co-operative in moving their boats to allow for dredging works at that end to take place. Otherwise, everything removed was put onto bonfires along the canal bed **(below)**, well away from the village, where they would cause minimum disturbance.

The vegetation clearance had also revealed long forgotten canal artefacts, including a brick-breastwork and paddle winding gear **(top, behind volunteer on left)** for letting water run out from the canal, when heavy rain required it. The excess water would have emptied into a stream that ran into a culvert under the canal, and then down to the River Great Ouse. That stream could provide an important source of water for the restored canal. The winding gear was in such good condition that, with minimum repair work, it could be reused, having not been used for over eighty-five years. This was living canal archaeology.

Jenny then took us to where clearance had yet to be done. This brought home to me just what an achievement the team had already made, and with it, the amazing condition the now-revealed



©Tim Coghlan

canal bed and towpath were in. Jenny told me that a lot more work would still need to be done before the canal could be rewatered, including the removal of tree roots, and testing the clay lining with a view to repairing it where needed.



Finally Jenny took us to where the canal had been brutally cut off by the A5 (**left**), with cars streaming past only metres away from us, just beyond the fence. It brought home to me the problem for the highways authority in 1962. The proposed new road would run at a lower level of about two metres to the canal, and engineering a route over or under the canal would have been a major task. No wonder the Ministry of Transport decided to override its

Inspector, who had stated in his report, that having heard all the evidence provided by the IWA - led by David Blagrove, then a young London solicitor - that the canal could well be restored. Terry told me that the decision had now come back to haunt the Ministry of Transport, and it would henceforth be supporting the proposed works to take the canal under that road (**right**).

With the completion of the works-in-hand by the Wergies, the towpath would be reopened to walkers and cyclists, connecting it to existing footpaths and rights of way. A new circular canal-walk would then be available. Starting at Cosgrove Lock, it would follow the reopened towpath to the bridleway along the A5. Then down to the River Great Ouse, and along it to the Iron Trunk Aqueduct. Then back along the Grand Union Canal to Cosgrove Lock. Near that lock is a CRT car park, and not far beyond that, the Barley Mow Inn. So all in all, the perfect five-mile circular canal walk, which could make the weekend newspapers.



I subsequently learnt from Jenny that the new circular walk was already proving very popular, and also that her team's endeavours had inspired new volunteers to join the Buckingham Canal Society. Perhaps more importantly all the clearing of the canal to the A5 had been completed on time on New Years Eve - a quite astonishing achievement, when all is considered!

It was time to celebrate with a great New Years Eve party in the scout building. The cooks rose to the occasion, serving a three course meal plus biscuits and cheese, and lots of festive wassail. The fitting end to the celebrations was watching the London fireworks display on Sue's laptop to see the New Year in, with the satisfaction of ending the old year with a great job well done. God bless you merry Wergie team, whom nothing seems to dismay!

Tim Coghlan
Managing Director, Braunston Marina

To Boldly Go...

Members will recall that last year we re-opened 500m of the canal from Bridge No.1 towards the A5 obstruction. To make it accessible for boats we needed to dredge out a section where the temporary crossing had been laid for the farmer's access during the bridge's construction. This was done before, and during, the BBC's filming for Countryfile (**see page 17**).

On 21st March we had regained the loan of Canal & River Trust's tug Shoveler, which they had been using for works at Stoke Bruerne's Locks. With Shoveler we were able to push-tow the mud hopper from Cosgrove Junction back to Bridge No.1 for further dredging work. This was somewhat easier than punting with long poles which had been the previous method, although steering 115ft of boat with shallow water on one side and moored boats on the other is not for the faint-hearted!

Returning to the junction, Shoveler was then used to push-tow our workboat Louise along the Buckingham Arm, a journey made more perilous by not having forward vision due to the high cabin on Louise and the low steering position of Shoveler. Louise had been loaded with materials destined for further use along the cut and we had been waiting for the opportunity to use our boats for exactly this. We proceeded through Bridge No.1 to an area of towpath which had broken down, and in the winter rains had actually been under water. The HIAB crane was used by new volunteer Lawrence John, assisted by Paul Morgan and myself, to unload 1 tonne bags of reclaimed broken roof tiles to use as a foundation for a rebuilt towpath. Previously, other materials had been laboriously shifted by wheelbarrow to this site (thanks to a Biffa corporate work party (**below**)) but transport by boat was a seriously better option.



© Steve Morley



© Steve Morley

Having achieved this we then continued to the landing stage (**above**) further along the canal, which was partially rebuilt last year. There we unloaded a consignment of Heras fence panels and feet which are destined for use further along, but conscious that I would have to reverse all the way back I deemed this to be a suitable unloading point. The opportunity was taken to collect some spare orange safety netting and lamp irons (sorry, nowadays road pins) to put around the bags on the towpath until the material can be laid.

It was then time to reverse back to the bridge, with steering being a challenge but ably assisted by Larry pushing on a long pole when necessary. Back at Bridge No.1 there was room to detach Shoveler, turn her round and re-attach at the other end of Louise for the push-tow back to the junction.

This was a historic event for two reasons; the first time in about 85 years that a boat had navigated this far along the Buckingham Canal, and the first time for probably even more years that the landing stage had been used for its original purpose! It is gratifying that progress is being made in restoring the canal, and that by opening the waterway, any ongoing maintenance will be made easier to achieve.

Steve Morley
Trustee

The Winter & Spring Wildlife Report

More Firsts for Site at Bourton Meadow!

As the Spring 2024 edition of The Buckingham Navigator could not go ahead as explained in my editorial, this edition will combine both the Winter and Spring Wildlife Reports. It is a fairly light report however, but with one or two site firsts and late seasonal surprises reported from Bourton Meadow by our two wildlife recorders Michael & Diane Hunt. Birds, Insects and Flora are covered within this report, covering November through March.

Well, where is the summer? It still feels like winter going on spring sometimes, and I'm still wearing jumpers! Barely has the temperature reached 20c this year, and up until recently, barely have we had a dry day. My garden has been in flood all year until only last month, making half of it unusable! That said, a garden first for me this year has been two Firecrests that have taken up residence mainly in the large conifers since at least 11th March. I do wonder if they are a pair. We've always had Goldcrests but never Firecrests! Blackcaps are thriving more than ever and Chiffchaff have been a regular presence for the second year running!

Last time I reported our first known Little Egret on site, but records of Great White Egrets are certainly increasing through Buckinghamshire and the surrounding counties too, so it was only a matter of time before one turned up at Bourton Meadow! A solitary Lapwing made an appearance too by Lockmeadow Cottage. We also had a couple of rather late Dragonflies in the shape of two Common Darters last November!

Winter 2023



Goldfinch © cazalegg
is licensed under CC BY 2.0

BIRDS: As autumn had it's feet under the table and winter was beckoning, Michael and Diane submitted their last report for 2023. A morning stroll along the canal on 6th November revealed just a handful of birds. Two Skylarks graced the skies with their presence, albeit just making their way from a to b. When spring returns, then their glorious cascading song will fill the skies once more! Two dusky looking Dunnocks (you may know them as Hedge Sparrows) were noted keeping close to the vegetation along the banks. Among the UK's most numerous songbirds, a vociferous Pied Wagtail was observed, as were it's close relatives in the shape of three Meadow Pipits, no doubt given away by their high pitched mono-syllabic 'ist-ist-ist' call, usually when flushed. Two gorgeous Goldfinches (**one**

pictured above) appeared, always given away by their 'jangling' song, and one Reed Bunting was perching on the reeds, although not always obvious, along the canal bank.



Lapwing © Original: Andreas Treppe (User Merops);
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The first report for 2024 brought a surprise sighting on the tilled field very close to Lockmeadow Cottage at the eastern end of the restored canal. A beautiful solitary Lapwing (**above**) was noted foraging here. Also known as a Peewit due to its call, they can't really be confused with any other bird. With a Cockatoo like crested crown often pronounced when alerted, greenish black uppers and white underparts with a variable greenish black chest band, these also congregate in large numbers, displaying a very comical tumbling display in flight. In fact, their upper feathers, particularly the scapulars and to a degree the median and greater coverts exhibit a gorgeous range of colours in the sun, much like oil on water! Khaki and lime greens blending into hints of orange, ruby red and purple through to rich cobalt, turquoise and ultramarine blues to name but a few. It really depends on how the light catches them, as the photo above illustrates so well. Such a joy to see on a sunny day!

Also noted near the cottage were a single Grey Heron, and four Thrushes including two Redwings and Song Thrushes. Michael stated that "just further west in the horse paddocks of Lockmeadow farm" were a Kestrel, a whopping thirty-four thrushes comprised of twenty-two Fieldfares and twelve Redwings!

INSECTS: The 6th November saw some Dragonflies still on the wing! Rather late you may think, but Common Darters are the commonest species at this time of the year, with their flight period ranging from May to as late as December. Michael & Diane saw two today!

Spring 2024

BIRDS: Unfortunately, there were just two small reports for spring this time. The first was made on 23rd February highlighting another first known sighting for Bourton Meadow. Michael exclaimed that with “great excitement, we saw our first ever Great White Egret (**below**) in Buckingham in the floods in the field between the canal and the river.” As I mentioned earlier, sightings of these are on the increase as they expand their breeding range northwards, perhaps connected to our warming climate or an increase in more favourable habitat (wetlands and marshes) in the UK. The species first bred in the UK in 2012 and there are thought to have been up to 24 pairs by 2019.



Great White Egrets are much larger than the more familiar and ‘showy’ Little Egret, being more similar in size to the Grey Heron. They can be seen in twos and threes if you are lucky like myself. I recall recording a first known sighting for Woolmer Pond on 11th July 2020, so can completely understand Michael and Diane’s excitement. Curiously, I also had a Little Egret just metres from it, clearly exhibiting the differences between the two!

FLORA: Michael pronounced that the first flowers of the Marsh Marigolds along the banks were open by 23rd February, seemingly far earlier than last year! He also provided a photo of them taken over a month later on 26th March (**opposite, top**).

You Too Can Contribute to The Seasonal Wildlife Report!

As always, the Society wishes to thank Michael & Diane Hunt for their contributions, which were forwarded to Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

Please keep your eyes peeled and let us know of any wildlife sightings along any stretch of the entirety of the Buckingham Canal, be it restored or not. You can send your records to myself or any of the trustees using our contact details on pages 34 and 35. For further details about the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, please visit: www.bbwt.org.uk.

Ian Matson
Editor



Marsh Marigolds ©Michael Hunt

Meet the Committee

Mandy Morley

I discovered canals and waterways at an early age through boating holidays and watersports. In my teens I lived not far from the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct on the Llangollen Canal and walked various lengths with family and friends. Whilst doing my Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award, I got involved with Waterway Recovery Group, initially as a general volunteer and later as a cook for both Canal Camps and various regional groups. It was on one such Winter Canal Camp that I met my now husband, Steve.

Since moving to Milton Keynes in the mid-nineties I have worked as a primary school teacher and teaching assistant, and for a time was on the Buckingham Canal Society committee and involved myself in some of the early canal festivals. Work and other commitments meant taking a step away from this, but my membership and involvement with the Society, as well as Waterway Recovery Group and Inland Waterways Association continued. Whilst physical health restrictions curtail hands-on restoration work, I bring a wealth of canal and community experience to the organisation that I hope will realise the reality of restoration.



Mandy Morley
Trustee

Steve Morley

My first work was in sales, but most of my career was in Human Resources. After becoming aware of canals while at university in Birmingham, I joined the Calder Navigation Society and spent several years helping operate their trip boat, covering much of the North East canals and rivers. I became interested in practical restoration and had been involved with Waterway Recovery Group on varied projects across the country.



On moving to Milton Keynes I became involved with Buckingham Canal Society, serving on the committee and participating in work parties, although Waterway Recovery Group became a greater attraction. Following retirement, I have been keen to join regular Society work parties and hope that over thirty years experience in canal restoration will benefit progress towards our goal. I have interests in all forms of transport, in particular enjoying railway modelling and visiting heritage sites.

Steve Morley
Trustee

Buckingham Canal Society Craft Group



Our craft group still isn't meeting, but I still continue to make the rag rugs which I am hoping to sell at the many planned visits to canal festivals and events throughout the coming year. These are sold on our Society stall for £25 each, raising much needed funds for us.

If any members have any unused or old T-shirts which are not wanted, then please get in touch with me using my contact details on page 34. They can still be used to make even more rag rugs.

Athina Beckett
Trustee, Volunteer Leader and
Work Party Organiser

Our Publicity & Recycling Stall Needs You

Our Publicity & Recycling stall is out and about throughout the year attending canal festivals and village events, while raising funds for the Society. If anyone fancies a change of scene, we readily welcome new people to come along and give a helping hand in running the stall. It's really good fun and you'll also get the chance to attend a wide variety of canal festivals and local events whilst helping to raise funds for our Society to restore the Buckingham Canal.

So why not come along and help us make a difference. You won't regret it.



To try to tempt you, some of the events attended in previous years include:

- *Buckingham Spring Fair in April*
- *May Day Fayre at Leighton Buzzard*
- *IWA Milton Keynes Lock Help Weekend at the Three Locks, Stoke Hammond in May*
- *Family Festival Weekend at Stoke Bruerne in June*
- *Braunston & Historic Narrowboat Rally & Canal Festival in June*
- *Our own Cosgrove Canal Festival & Craft Fair in July*
- *Linslade Canal Festival in July*
- *The Festival of Water at St Neots in August*
- *Village at War Weekend at Stoke Bruerne in September*
- *Buckingham Christmas Fair in December*

We will certainly attend many of these events and more in the future. The Village at War event, for example, is always great fun, as you get the chance to dress up in 1940s costume! It's worth noting that over £1,800 was raised for our canal restoration work by this stall alone in 2019! I'm sure we can beat that this year now we are back and out & about!

If you have any good quality bric-a-brac that you would like to donate, or would like to give us a hand on the stall this year, please get in touch using my contact details on page 34.

Athina Beckett

Trustee, Volunteer Leader and Work Party Organiser

Funders

We are very grateful for the financial support from all of our funders. Listed below in chronological order, beginning with the latest, are our most recent funders:

- Co-op - Local Community Fund
- Heart of Bucks Community Foundation - Veolia Water Technologies Fund
- Buckingham & Villages Community Board
- The Woodroffe Benton Foundation
- Heart of Bucks Community Foundation - B P Collins Fund
- The Skinners' Company - The Lady Neville Charity
- Waitrose & Partners
- Moto in the Community Trust
- Arnold Clark Community Fund
- The National Lottery Awards for All England
- Heart of Bucks Community Foundation for Buckinghamshire - Bucks Coronavirus Stabilisation Fund
- HDH Wills Charitable Trust - Martin Wills Wildlife Maintenance Fund
- Buckinghamshire Council - Local Authority Discretionary Grant
- Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust - Thriving Communities Fund

Patrons, Partners & Supporters

We are very grateful for the continued support of our patrons:

- Lord Boswell of Aynho
- Lord & Lady Scott of Foscote

We have formal partnerships with the following:

- Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust
- Buckinghamshire Council
- Buckingham Town Council
- Canal & River Trust
- Deanshanger Parish Council
- Environment Agency
- Inland Waterways Association - Corporate Member
- The Conservation Volunteers
- West Northamptonshire Council

We are very grateful for the ongoing support of:

- Inland Waterways Association - Milton Keynes Branch
- Inland Waterways Association - Northampton Branch
- Waterway Recovery Group and their regional volunteers

We have been recognised by the following:

- Cosgrove Parish Council
- Foscote Parish Meeting
- Maids Moreton Parish Council
- Old Stratford Parish Council
- Thornborough Parish Council
- Thornton Parish Meeting

Corporate Members

Braunston Marina



Lionhearts Cruising Club



Taverners Boat Club



The Wyvern Shipping Co Ltd



**Inland Waterways Association
Northampton Branch**

We Support:



Corporate & External Volunteer Groups

We are very grateful to all of the organisations that have ever assisted us with their volunteer groups. Listed below in chronological order, beginning with the latest, are our most recent attendees:

- NHBC
- Biffa
- Audi UK
- Santander
- Senceive Ltd
- Network Rail
- Studio B2
- The British Standards Institution
- Mitie Group plc
- The Coca-Cola Company
- Galliford Try Holdings plc
- BayWa r.e. UK Ltd
- Cranfield University
- Ingram Micro
- Cummins
- Arriva UK Bus - Procurement
- HSBC UK Bank plc
- British Telecommunications plc
- The Royal Latin School
- Milton Keynes College
- Sava
- Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles
- Waterway Recovery Group - Bit in the Middle
- Kent & East Sussex Canal Restoration Group
- Waterway Recovery Group -London
- RS Components
- Marsh LLC
- Hallam Land Management Ltd
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints - Northampton Stake
- The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales
- McAfee
- Eddyfi Technologies - TSC

Future Events

Saturday 29th - Sunday 30th June

Fellows, Morton & Clayton Ltd

Rally & Canal Festival

Braunston Marina, Braunston,
Nr Daventry, Northants, NN11 7JH

Details: 01788-891373

www.braunstonmarina.co.uk

Saturday 20th - Sunday 21st July

Buckingham Canal Society

Cosgrove Canal Festival & Craft Fair

Cosgrove Lock, Cosgrove, Milton Keynes,
Northants, MK19 7JR

Details: See pages 16 & 17

Saturday 27th July 11am - 5pm

Linslade Canal Festival

Tiddenfoot Waterside Park, Linslade,
Leighton Buzzard, Beds, LU7 2AE.

Details: www.leightonlinslade-tc.gov.uk

Saturday 3rd - Sunday 4th August

IWA Milton Keynes

Fenny Stratford Canal Festival

Towpath south of Watling Street Bridge,
Fenny Stratford,

Milton Keynes, Bucks, MK2

Details: diane.witts@waterways.org.uk

Getting the Word Out There About Events in Your Area

If any members know of events or festivals they think might be of interest to other Buckingham Canal Society members, please get in touch. **Could you please forward the details on to me using my contact details on page 30, and I will include them in this listing.**

Athina Beckett

**Trustee, Volunteer Leader and Work
Party Organiser**

Win Big with Buckinghamshire Lottery

The Buckinghamshire Lottery is an exciting weekly lottery that raises money for good causes. Buckingham Canal Society has registered with the Buckinghamshire Lottery as a beneficiary.

Tickets are just £1 per week, and 50% of that will come directly to the Society, provided you nominate us as your preferred charity.

Each ticket has a 1 in 50 chance of winning a prize, with a top prize of £20,000. Every ticket consists of 6 numbers and each of those is between 1 and 9. There is a draw every Saturday night when a 6 digit winning combination is picked. Match all 6 and you can win the jackpot!

However, before you buy, please do not forget to select Buckingham Canal Society as your preferred charity, otherwise your money will be directed into a general charitable fund, which we do not benefit from. Good Luck!

To play and support BCS you will need to visit the Vale Lottery website to register and buy tickets at: www.buckinghamshirelottery.co.uk.

Work Party Dates 2024/2025

July

Every Tuesday
Every Thursday
Sunday 14th

August

Every Tuesday
Every Thursday
Sunday 11th

September

Every Tuesday
Every Thursday
Sunday 8th

October

Every Tuesday
Every Thursday
Sunday 13th

November

Every Tuesday
Every Thursday
Sunday 10th

December

Every Tuesday
Every Thursday
Sunday 8th

January

Every Tuesday
Every Thursday
Sunday 12th

February

Every Tuesday
Every Thursday
Sunday 9th

March

Every Tuesday
Every Thursday
Sunday 9th

April

Every Tuesday
Every Thursday
Sunday 13th

May

Every Tuesday
Every Thursday
Sunday 11th

June

Every Tuesday
Every Thursday
Sunday 8th

Next Navigator

So we are nearing the end of another issue of the Navigator and I am sure many of you are eager for more. You can be part of what appears in the next issue. There are regular items from the committee but there is space assigned to YOU, our valued members, for your submissions. I am also always very interested to hear what you think of the newsletter and comments are most welcome!

Please submit all contributions for Issue 120 (Autumn 2024) by the 1st August 2024 via email, CD, or typed/handwritten letter (in that order of preference) to:

editor@buckinghamcanal.org.uk or

Ian Matson, 63 Almers Road, Lyne, Chertsey, Surrey, KT16 0BH

Advertising with us We welcome advertisements in the Navigator to assist funding. Rates are as below. Payment is required before copy date.
Cheques made payable to "Buckingham Canal Society". 33% reduction for 3 issues.

Whole Page: £16

Quarter Page: £6

Back Page: £22

Half Page: £10

Inserts: £7.50

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Paul Rodgers

Trustee



Trustee

We are interested to hear from people who would like to join us as trustees.





Other Key Contacts

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Illustrated Talks & Presentations

talks@buckinghamcanal.org.uk

Cosgrove Festival Team

events@buckinghamcanal.org.uk

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Tel: 01525 372355 Fax: 01525852308

Website: www.canalholidays.co.uk Email: wyvern@canalholidays.co.uk

Members of: IWA, APCO, BMF, B&MK Waterway Trust, Wendover Arm Trust,
Buckingham Canal Society, Aylesbury Canal Society.



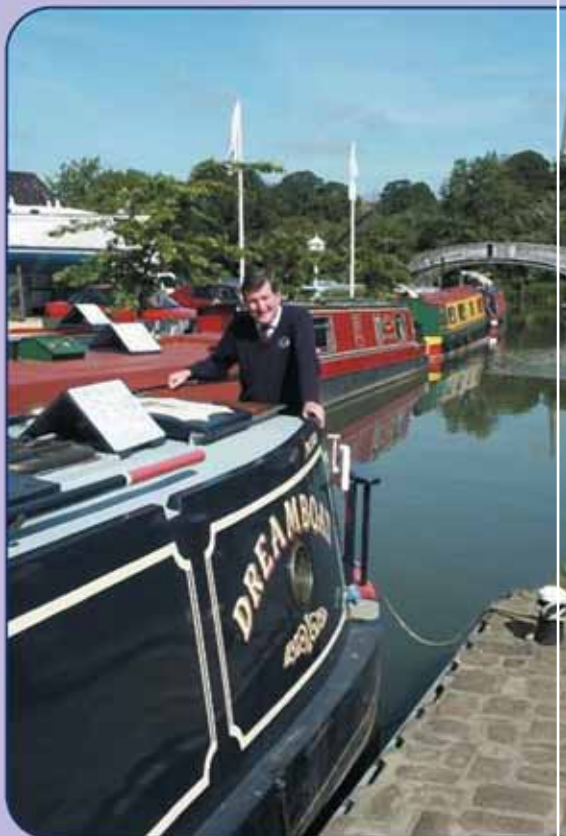
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