**press release**

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**HISTORIC BRIDGES RESTORED ALONG WEST MIDLANDS CANALS**

This week work has started on a £ ½ million project to repair and restore a number of historic cast iron bridges along the canal in the Black Country.

The bridges, some of which are Grade II Listed, date back to the mid-18th Century and are among the most iconic symbols of the Birmingham Canal Navigation in the West Midlands.  Built by Horseley Iron Works in Tipton, the bridges, with their characteristic ‘webs of iron’ and gothic style designs have, over the years, suffered from wear and tear and now need some major restoration.

The works, which are being carried out by the charity Canal & River Trust, are part of a larger project to repair and repaint 13 of these popular and well-known bridges.

Each of the bridges will have the old paint removed, the metalwork carefully repaired and then several coats of specialist paint applied.  Once finished they should look like they would have done when they were first constructed over 210 years ago.

The first three bridges to be repaired are the Boshboil Arm Bridge which is near Dudley, the Tame Valley No.1 Bridge and the Gower Branch Turnover Bridge both near Tipton.

Audrey O’Connor, heritage advisor for the Canal & River Trust, said: “These bridges are typical of the canals in the West Midlands and really help to bring the history of the waterways alive for people.  The fact that they are still working as they were intended after all this time is a testament to the engineers who built them, but they are showing their age.  The work we are doing will ensure people will be able to enjoy them for many years to come."

“We have over 100 miles of canal in the West Midlands and it is teeming with clues as to its past.  If you look closely at some of the stonework and handrails you will see that they are scored and marked with rope marks caused by generations of working boat people using horses to tow barges along the canals.  These unique markings will be preserved, allowing people literally to run their fingers across the imprints made by our ancestors.”

Peter Mathews CMG, chair of the West Midlands Waterways Partnership for the Canal & River Trust, said: “The history of the canal is all around us, you just need to know where to look for it.  Most of the bridges are date stamped so if you will easily be able to spot when they were built and I would really encourage everyone to get out and explore your local canal and see what secret history you can uncover.”

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors**

**The bridges to be repaired include:**

- Factory Basin Bridge, Tipton

- Turnover Bridge North, Coseley

- Saltwells Bridge, Dudley

- Moorcroft Junction Bridge, Wednesbury

- Peartree Roving Bridge, Dudley

- Watery Lane Junction Bridge, Tipton

- Hollis Bridge, Oldbury

- Dudley Port Junction Bridge, Sandwell

- Old Hill Furnace Basin Bridge, Oldbury

- Lock 20 Botterham Bottom Lock Bridge, near Dudley

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The Canal & River Trust is the guardian of 2,000 miles of historic waterways across England and Wales.  We are among the largest charities in the UK, maintaining the nation’s third largest collection of Listed structures, as well as museums, archives, navigations and hundreds of important wildlife sites.

We believe that our canals and rivers are a national treasure and a local haven for people and wildlife. It is our job to care for this wonderful legacy – holding it in trust for the nation in perpetuity and giving people a greater role in the running of their local waterways.