

PRESS RELEASE

2 May 2025

NATIONAL CANAL HERITAGE SURVEY COMMENCES ON THE LEEDS & LIVERPOOL CANAL

Waterways charity Canal & River Trust has commenced a heritage survey of the nation's canal network, starting with the 127-mile-long Leeds & Liverpool Canal.

The project will chart how the charity's canals, and the wider canal corridor, have changed over the past 30 years by updating and augmenting a joint British Waterways and Historic England survey of canals completed back in the early 1990s.

Undertaking the volunteer-led survey of the Trust's 2,000-mile network of canals and the historic setting around them is expected to take four years. It is being made possible thanks to funds raised by players of Peoples Postcode Lottery.

The previous early 1990s government agency-run survey recorded, using pen and paper, the physical engineering feats of the industrial age such as the centuries-old locks, bridges, aqueducts and tunnels – including many of the 10,000 such structures looked after today by the Canal & River Trust.

The new survey will record buildings associated with the canal, locks and lock cottages, bridges, aqueducts, tunnels, wharfs, warehouses, and stables. It will also include important detail such as mileposts, horse ramps and cobbles that make up the rich fabric of the Britain's unique and much-loved canal network. Later features such as the World War II pill boxes built along the canal, between Wigan and Liverpool in 1940, will also be recorded. The latest study will also include around 200 miles of canal restored since the first survey was conducted.

A team of 25 volunteers have started the survey on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, between Wigan, Leigh and Liverpool, in the North West. It will then be rolled out across the Trust's network of canals that span England and Wales.

As well as physically surveying and photographing what's present along the ageing canal network, the team will also utilise historical maps, photos and archive text to chart as much as

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possible about what has been lost or changed since the canal network's use as a freight network hundreds of years ago and since the last survey over 30 years ago.

The study will enhance the existing digital database which can be kept up to date on an iterative basis rather than being a snapshot of a particular moment in time. The records will be instrumental in ensuring the historic integrity of the canal network is protected for future generations. It can also take the opportunity to consider lost or hidden heritage, for example archaeological heritage in the case of known previously demolished canal side buildings, where development is due to take place.

Bill Froggatt, heritage adviser at Canal & River Trust, explains: "Thirty years after the first survey was completed, our charity has secured the funding to be able to go out and update and add to those original records. Using the support of our wonderful volunteers and embracing modern mobile technology, it will be a project that celebrates this wonderful legacy from our industrial past and helps preserve it for the future.

"Today the love for canals is burning bright. There are more boats on the network than at the height of the industrial revolution and the towpath is used by millions of people each week to get close to nature and to improve health and wellbeing by spending vital time in quality and much needed green space by water.

"The new survey will give us important information on how canals have changed over the intervening years. It will also give us the opportunity to survey canals that have been restored since the first survey was conducted. Together, the Trust and our volunteers will learn more about the history of the charity's network of canals."

The first survey ran from 1988 to 1993 and recorded more than 12,000 historic structures on the 2,000 miles of inland waterways in England and Wales.

Around 30,000 photographs were taken as part of the project and the information and photographs recorded provided an important archive of inland waterway heritage at that time and is still used today.

Bill added: "The historic structures on our inland waterways come in all shapes and sizes, from the majestic aqueducts such as Pontcysyllte to the humbler humpback bridges, marked by the ropes of thousands of passing boats, to locks and milestones. This heritage gives a location a distinct character and is a lasting legacy of all the people who helped build our canals.

"Some were designed by our great civil engineers, others built by local crafts people. All conjure up an image of life on the canals 200 years ago. These historic structures are still in use today providing some of the world's finest examples of living industrial heritage and providing much needed outdoor space for 10 million people that visit the canals each year."

For more information on the Canal & River Trust, including how you can donate money or volunteer to support, visit canalrivertrust.org.uk.

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Notes to Editors

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day. www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

£24 million has been awarded by Postcode Earth Trust thanks to funds raised by Postcode Lottery players to support Canal & River Trust in delivering a wide range of important waterway and wellbeing projects, helping the Trust to preserve and transform canals and waterways into spaces where people can spend time and experience the benefits of being by water. For more information visit www.postcode lottery.co.uk/good-causes/charities/canal-river-trust