



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

Issue 18 Autumn/Winter 2023

Waterfront

The Canal & River Trust Magazine

A waterway wonder

Look back at the unique history of the Anderton Boat Lift

Ranvir Singh

The TV star shares her family's joy
in spending time by water

Keep canals alive

Thanks to a little help from our Friends, canal heritage,
wildlife and wellbeing will live on

#ActNowForCanals

Front cover

Welcome

It's a pleasure to bring you our latest edition of Waterfront magazine for 2023, at a time when the past, future and present-day life of canals is on our minds.

We're determined to keep canals alive, even in the face of challenging cuts to future government funding. Thanks to help from Friends like you, and many other generous supporters of our charity, it's a challenge we're ready to face. Together, we can prevent canals falling back into decline.

As you can see from our appeal, protecting an iconic wonder like Anderton Boat Lift is an urgent priority and, in this issue, we look back on its history full of ebbs and flows. With the help of fellow Friend, John Langford, we also re-visit our canals before their renaissance began.

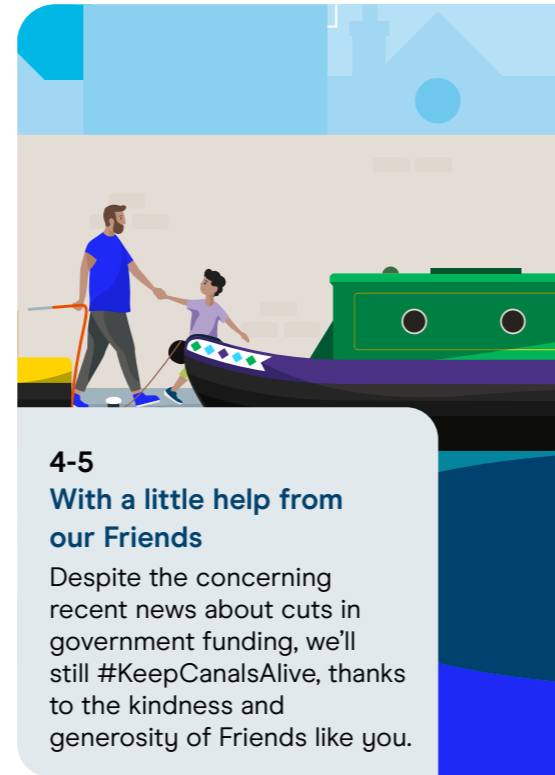
Read how we're keeping the River Ouse alive with nature, by saving the beautiful Tansy beetle and celebrate how we're keeping Gloucester Docks, and canals of Walsall, Smethwick and Sandwell alive for local people to enjoy. TV broadcaster Ranvir Singh also shares how time by water adds to the quality of her family's life every single day.

Finally, discover how we're managing the water in our canals in the midst of climate change and learn how Friends from as far afield as the United States are helping to secure the future of our world-famous waterways.

Thank you as always for helping us continue to make life better by water. While canals face many challenges, we know that with your support and generosity, our charity can rise to meet them.

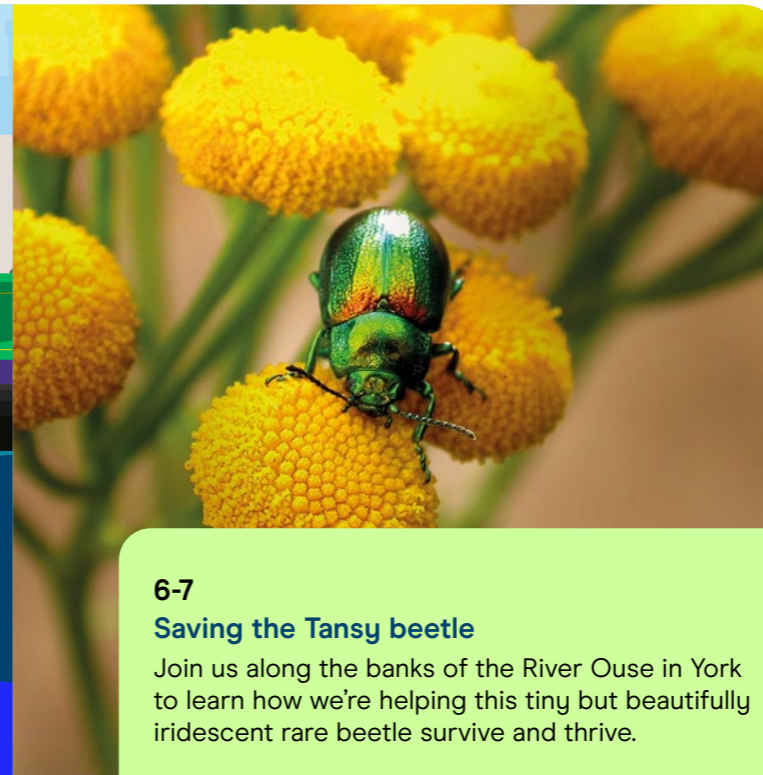
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Join us along the banks of the River Ouse in York to learn how we're helping this tiny but beautifully iridescent rare beetle survive and thrive.



Where's your Waterfront?

Many thanks for your selfies reading your Waterfront Magazine in your favourite canal places. Our Towpath Taskforce based at Hyndburn, Lancashire took this picture at a new halfway canal marker between Leeds and Liverpool. Designed by local schoolchildren and representing barge hull shapes and local wildlife, the markers sit exactly 63.625 miles from each city. Keep your waterfront pictures and stories coming! Send them into friends@canalrivertrust.org.uk



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Discover how Lutfur Rahman is breathing new life into Walsall, Smethwick and Sandwell by helping local people to enjoy and care for their local canals.

With a little help from our Friends



When you face challenging times, there's nothing better than having good friends around to support you. And right now, government funding cuts are causing all of us who love canals huge concern. Unless there's a change of heart, we fear parts of our wonderful 2,000 mile, 250-year-old network could fall back into decline. Some canals could even close. So now, we all need to come together, as Friends, defenders and champions of life by water to help #KeepCanalsAlive.

We are determined to fight these cuts, and we hope you will join our campaign to reverse them. But if government won't invest in canals, then we must rise to the challenge of doing it ourselves.

In just 10 years, from a standing start, our charity has managed to grow funding for canals from many different sources. We've already grown the income we earn from our investments, commercial activities, grant funders, corporate supporters and, of course, from Friends like you.

Just in the last year alone, almost 30,000 Friends generously gave canals almost £3 million. And as you can see here, together we're investing every penny to protect our industrial heritage, improve canal infrastructure, restore waterway wildlife and bring wellbeing to people living in the heart of our cities.

At the same time our volunteer numbers have grown massively. By giving their time so generously, every one of these amazing people is caring for canals in ways that otherwise we simply couldn't afford to do.

Nonetheless, the government will be reducing its grant for canals year on year from 2027. Over ten years we estimate it will mean our charity faces a £300 million shortfall. Clearly that's the kind of money that no-one can afford to lose. And it's a sum that will be very challenging to raise.

But with your help, and by calling on everyone who loves canals to play their part, we can keep our great canal revival going. Now more than ever we are determined to protect the canals you love.

The amazing generosity of Friends like you will help to ensure our irreplaceable canal heritage survives, our inspiring water wildlife thrives and our invaluable healthy, green and peaceful public towpaths are kept open and accessible to everyone. Thank you. Together, we can. Together, we will #KeepCanalsAlive

Support our campaign
canalrivertrust.org.uk/keepcanalsalive



In 2022 funds from Friends like you helped us spend:



Over **£800,000** improving locks, bridges and dock walls

At Liverpool South Docks, West India Docks, and the Leeds & Liverpool Canal and River Trent



Over **£500,000** restoring canal heritage

Helping to deliver vital refurbishment works at Anderton Boat Lift and at Crofton Pumping Station on the Kennet & Avon Canal



Over **£345,000** reviving nature

Removing invasive weeds on the Chesterfield and Bridgwater & Taunton Canals. Plus repairing vandalism on our newly built fish pass at Bevere on the River Severn



Almost **£250,000** restoring canals

Helping to bring many more miles of the Montgomery Canal back into use. See page 8



Almost **£150,000** upgrading towpaths

Along the River Tees, helping walkers, anglers and cyclists find a clear way to wellbeing

Saving the Tansy beetle

Thanks in part to your support for our charity, a tiny, iridescent leaf beetle, now endangered in the UK, and across the world, is thriving on the banks of the River Ouse near York. The Tansy beetle, no bigger than a fingernail, makes its home almost exclusively along a 30-mile corridor of the river.



Our ecologists are helping to care for the Ouse population, as it is crucial to the beetles' survival in the UK. While two smaller colonies have been discovered recently in the Cambridgeshire Fens, if the Ouse population were to fail, there's every chance this remarkable beetle could disappear from our shores forever.

The Tansy beetle, known affectionately as the 'Jewel of York', derives its name from the tansy plant, which provides it with food, shelter and a place to lay its eggs. Clumps of tansy are found in abundance on the banks of the River Ouse, which is why the population here is so successful, peaking at some 40,000 beetles in 2016.

However, the tansy plant is facing its own issues, with shading from willow trees and competition from invasive species resulting in sparse, fragmented clumps. Oddly, Tansy beetles prefer to walk rather than fly, and if their tansy clump disappears, they can struggle to find more.

In collaboration with the Tansy Beetle Action Group (TBAG), who monitor and survey the population each year, our regional ecologist, Phillippa Baron teamed up with Dr Geoff Oxford from the University of York to introduce a new colony at nearby Naburn Lock. They chose a tansy clump in a quiet, elevated spot, and with the help of the City of York Council, erected an information board, so visitors can read all about the beetles and their habitat.

As Geoff, who has been studying the biology of the Tansy beetle for more than 30 years, explains: "Creating safe havens, where beetle populations can be protected, is important to preserve numbers. The tansy plant naturally thrives at Naburn, and with so many visitors to Naburn Lock, it's an ideal site for an 'educational' population, where families can take their children to have a look for the beetle and learn more about it."

Early signs are good, and with any luck, larvae will have emerged from the ground this summer as fully grown adults, establishing a new permanent colony at Naburn Lock and ensuring this elusive beetle continues to thrive here in years to come.

As ecologist, Phillippa tells us: "Conservation of the environment along our canals and riverbanks is an important part of our work and we know that nature and wildlife attract people to visit our rivers and canals. So, it's great that we can work with partners to educate people about a rare and endangered species such as the Tansy beetle."

Spot a Tansy beetle next spring
canalrivertrust.org.uk/places-to-visit/naburn

Restoring hope on the Montgomery Canal

On a glorious June day, visitors lined the towpath at Crickheath in Shropshire to celebrate the official reopening of a newly-restored section of the Montgomery Canal. The ribbon-cutting ceremony, featuring local VIPs, heritage boats, volunteer groups and plenty of food and drink, marked the latest phase of the canal's restoration, a labour of love that began more than half a century ago.

Built at the tail-end of the 18th century, in its pomp the Montgomery Canal, known locally as the Monty, was a busy trade route, bristling with narrowboats laden with coal, limestone and timber. By the late 19th century, traffic on the canal began to wane, slowing to a trickle by the 1930s. A breach in the canal near the River Perry

in 1936 signalled its demise, and not long after, the Monty was abandoned.

It would be two decades before restoration efforts began, sparked by protests at a proposed bypass along the route of the canal near Welshpool. Work got underway a few years later in 1969 with the famous 'Big Dig', and ever since,

local volunteers, partners and charities have been striving to restore the canal to full navigation, from the Llangollen Canal via Llanymynech and Welshpool to Newtown in Powys. Thanks to the heroic work of volunteers so far, 21 of the 35 miles of the Monty have been painstakingly repaired and reopened, with support, advice, expertise and mentoring from Canal & River Trust engineers, heritage experts and ecologists.

This latest breakthrough at Crickheath means boaters can now navigate the eight miles from Frankton Locks, where the canal meets the Llangollen Canal, to Crickheath Basin. It's a wonderful achievement, taking eight years and hundreds of hours to complete.

Our chief executive, Richard Parry, was first to offer his congratulations, saying: "What these volunteers have achieved is truly inspiring. They've worked tirelessly to restore this section of the Montgomery Canal from a derelict channel to a wonderful canal that boaters, walkers, and cyclists can now use and enjoy."

But the work doesn't end there. The aim has always been to restore the Monty to full navigation, and volunteers are moving swiftly on to the next phase of restoration, along the canal at Schoolhouse Bridge.

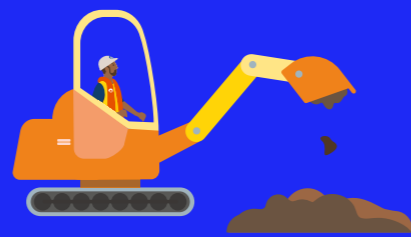
"There's still plenty of work to do," says Richard, "and especially after recent government funding cuts, more external funding is needed if we're to reach our goal, but restoring the entire section of canal has never been closer. I'm looking forward to the day when boaters will once again travel from England to Wales along the Montgomery Canal."

Crickheath Basin promises to be a popular destination with boaters and landlubbers alike, with beautiful scenery, walking trails and plenty of activities. It's all thanks to the hard work, grit and determination of local volunteers, following proudly in the footsteps of those pioneers who first broke ground at Welshpool all those years ago.



Before

169
volunteers
excavated and moved around
15,000 tonnes of materials



After

"What these volunteers have achieved is truly inspiring,"

Richard Parry

Volunteers spent over
300 days
lining the canal to make
it watertight



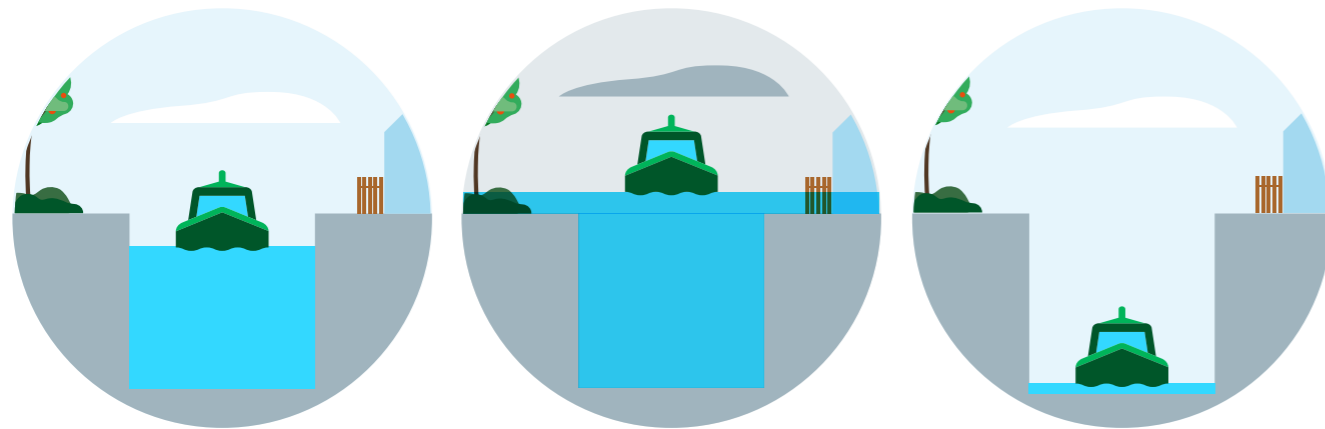


Balancing our waters



If there's one thing that's fundamental to keeping canals alive, it's water. Without it there are no boats, nature, or historic lifts to visit. No reason for walkers, anglers, or visitors to come to our canals and rivers. But managing our waters is a delicate balancing act.

We caught up with our national hydrology manager, Adam Comerford, to learn how he and his team plan ahead to keep our water levels just right, in the face of a warmer climate, more stringent legislation and funding cuts. "We had the driest June on record, meaning we had to temporarily close some canals at the height of the boating season," Adam explains. "It was followed by one of the wettest Julys the UK has ever seen."



"We're aiming for what is sometimes described as a Goldilocks situation.

Not too much water so that it increases the risk of floods.

Not too little that our reservoirs or canals run dry.

We want to ensure we get it just right."

Adam Comerford, national hydrology manager

So, the extreme effects of climate change are probably already with us. Last year was the worst in my career for canal restrictions and closures due to water shortages. Even so, around 85% of the network was still very much available for boating."

Meanwhile, the recent government funding cuts have huge implications for the future of our valuable water resources. "Let's say this reduction in funding leads to asset deterioration. If we can't afford to repair or replace critical infrastructure, like lock gates, or run pumps to recirculate water, more water will simply leak out of our network and the impacts will be felt through more water shortage restrictions, especially in the peak summer boating months."

All of this comes at a pivotal time, when the Trust is pouring tens of millions into essential reservoir restoration works, like the one at Toddbrook Reservoir in Derbyshire.

Meanwhile, the water industry as a whole is working hard to use water more wisely, developing schemes to reduce demand for water or to increase supply. The Trust needs almost as much water each day to maintain navigation as the bigger water companies in England, so the scale of our work and the responsibility to manage water carefully is huge.

Legislation is now also limiting how much water our canals can take from streams, rivers and groundwater. From an environmental point of view, it makes no sense to dry up natural rivers and streams to fill up thirsty canals and canal reservoirs. But our water management team are confident they can find a healthy balance, having devised a five-point strategy to help us manage water more efficiently. Adam, for one, is optimistic about the future.

"Despite all the challenges, there's a lot of positive things going on," he tells us. "For the first time in a generation, there's a realisation that water companies can't solve all of society's water problems, that it's a shared endeavour, with us, the government, agriculture, industry and regulators all working together to ensure this precious resource is carefully managed.

By working together, we can transfer water to where it's needed most. We can invest in infrastructure to stop leaks and move water around. We can improve our reservoir resilience and hopefully attract investment into canals from water companies and others. Then our waterways can keep flowing for everyone who uses them – after all, water is literally the lifeblood of the canals."



Turning back the clock

As we work to #KeepCanalsAlive, it's worth remembering the challenging times our canals faced in the past. Here, fellow Friend John Langford shares his slides of canals in the late fifties and early sixties, just before the restoration movement rescued canals for the nation. Come with us as he recalls his treasured memories from exploring the network.

"Remember, this was the era of the Beeching report, when railways as well as canals were in peril," says John, explaining how his slides came to be taken between 1959 and 1965. "At the time, my gang of railway enthusiast friends and I were keen 'railway bashers'; not trainspotters exactly as we weren't into steam trains themselves. But keen recorders of the branch lines, stations, bridges and tunnels that were being lost. And we soon discovered another, even older, transport network in danger.

So, we also became 'canal bashers', hiring boats and travelling the remaining canals as far as we could. It was a kind of private passion to record these unrestored, unloved canals. Perhaps for posterity before they disappeared forever. We preferred canals that were byways, off the beaten track, but even on a mainline canal like the Grand Union, many of the towpaths were simply overgrown and impassable back then."

Caldon Canal



John says: "Not sure where this is, but it was a super trip. The canal was so thick with reeds, we had to bow-haul the boat from the towpath. You didn't need to steer because you were so hemmed in. Stockton Brook lock was as far as we could go."

Burghfield Lock, Kennet & Avon Canal



John says: "This is taken in 1959 and is an engagement party for one of my good railway friends. I knew everyone on that boat, most now gone, sadly. It was quite a sight for the lads gongoozling us. You didn't see many fully laden passenger boats afloat at the time."

Bulls Bridge, Southall, Grand Union Canal



John says: "Looking now, I don't think these British Waterways boats were awaiting orders. They look pretty much abandoned. Makes the sign all the more poignant. Why do these boats have metal covers on them? Perhaps readers could enlighten us?"

Hillmorton, near Rugby, Oxford Canal



John says: "The white laundry flapping over these working boats is only just above a full load of black coal on its way south to a paper mill near Rickmansworth. All their coal was still carried by canal even this late into the 20th Century."

Thrupp, near Kidlington, Oxford Canal



John says: "So this is a motorboat from the John Woolford company with its butty, an unpowered barge, moored alongside. These two would have worked together on the Oxford Canal with the motorboat pulling the butty. Pretty things, aren't they?"

Etruria, Stoke on Trent, Trent & Mersey Canal



John says: "In the background is Shelton Steelworks, a huge complex between the canal and railway. The angler probably lived in those terraced houses. Hope he caught something, given the state of the water back then!"



“We can’t go back to canals being no-go areas and let all the good work we’re doing for nature, wellbeing and as volunteers go by the wayside.”

Ranvir Singh

Canal correspondent

Away from the bright lights of the ‘Good Morning Britain’ TV studio, journalist and broadcaster Ranvir Singh loves the quiet life, walking and fishing the Grand Union Canal with her family. As she tells Waterfront, it only felt natural to become an Ambassador for our charity. Now she’s helping us #KeepCanalsAlive, so they don’t go back into decline.

“Growing up in Preston I didn’t really go near the Lancaster Canal,” explains Ranvir. “Back then canals were seen as a bit dodgy. It sounds funny now, but as a child I’d have said they were where ‘Dirty Den’ got shot on Eastenders!

But when I started working as a journalist for BBC Radio Lancashire, I covered stories across the county and fell in love with landscapes; canals are part of that. But the connection really came when our family moved close to the Grand Union Canal.

When you have a child, you want them to appreciate their surroundings. So, the canal became part of our daily life; we’d pop to the shops along the towpath.

Honestly, I was amazed by the beauty and peace. The way the light bounces off the water. How it ices over in winter. The nature that lives by the canal. The little ecosystem of canal people; boaters, walkers, cyclists and anglers.

My son Tushaan has fallen for fishing. It’s a lovely thing, as my partner is a keen angler too. It all started when I saw a Let’s Fish! sign near us. The coaches were so brilliantly warm and welcoming; so giving of their time and expertise. Children need to explore their personality and find a way to shine. And he’s caught carp, pike, roach, even a really weird crayfish.

We have a quality of life we didn’t have before. Now we can’t imagine living away from the

canal. When I joined some Canal & River Trust volunteers at Park Royal in London recently, I realised how lucky we are to have these blue and green spaces, as so many don’t have gardens or any outside space of their own.

And that’s why I was sad and quite worried to hear about the government funding cuts to canals. We’re going to have to work even harder, to plug that gap. We can’t go back to canals being no-go areas and let all the good work we’re doing for nature, wellbeing and as volunteers go by the wayside.

Governments do need to make very difficult decisions. This is one they’ve made. All we can do is show our support for canals however we can. The Canal & River Trust has achieved so much, so quickly, we can’t give up now.”



Ranvir’s son Tushaan has developed a love of fishing

A gift to our canals from America

Husband and wife, Brian and Debbie, have been cruising our canals for the past 25 years, covering almost every inch of our network. Hailing from South Carolina, over the years, they've introduced 44 fellow Americans, including friends, family and neighbours, to our waterways. Now, their love of our canals, countryside and heritage has inspired them to leave a kind and generous gift to our charity in their Wills. Brian shares their story.

"My wife, Debbie, and I both enjoyed successful careers that took us all over the world. But until 1998, I'd never been to Europe. Debbie was born in Blackpool, and when she was asked to travel to England on business, she jumped at the chance. Keen to see the country for myself, I came along for the ride.

Driving to her business meeting in Wetherby, we had an epiphany. As we crossed over the Leeds & Liverpool Canal at East Marton, a bright, colourful narrowboat with flowers on its roof

passed beneath us. Struck by what we saw, later that day we stopped in nearby Skipton and booked a short boat trip. We were immediately hooked.

Although I'd learned about the golden age of canals at school, until that trip, I had no idea the canal network was still so vibrant. The thought of drifting gently through the English countryside really captured my imagination, so once we returned stateside I began planning our next adventure.



Debbie and Brian (left) regularly enjoy a canalside pint, their favourite pub being the Holly Bush in Denford on the Caldon Canal



Over the years, Brian and Debbie have invited friends along for the trip, often hiring two boats and cruising in tandem

The following year, we booked a short three-day break on the Shropshire Union Canal. Although we banded around a little at first, we soon found our sea legs. We've since taken 16 more canal holidays, often in the company of friends and family who crossed the pond to share the experience.

In all, we've clocked up 2,493 miles, passing through 2,262 locks and 90 tunnels in 232 days. Perhaps our most memorable experience afloat was a two-week, two-boat cruise around the South Pennine Ring in 2014, which included a thrilling journey through Standedge Tunnel.

Even though I'm older than dirt, I've never got around to preparing a Will. Several years ago, it dawned on me that a lot of my friends and

family were passing away around me. I thought, 'wait a minute, that might happen to me someday'.

We've both enjoyed successful careers and we never wanted kids, so over the years the value of our estate has become quite healthy. When we thought about leaving a gift to charity, there was no question. We wanted to give something back to the canals that have given us so much pleasure over the years, helping to protect and preserve them so that future generations can enjoy the beauty, tranquillity and camaraderie to be found on these wonderful waterways. Just as we have."

If you'd like to find out more about gifts in Wills

Contact kali.milburn@canalrivertrust.org.uk
Visit canalrivertrust.org.uk/giftsinwills



Talking on the towpath

Every other year, tall sailing ships return to Gloucester Docks, the furthest inland port in the UK. But in between times, the docks are alive and buzzing with shops, restaurants, offices and apartments and our charity's very own National Waterways Museum, all housed in handsomely restored former grain, salt and timber warehouses. On a recent visit, Waterfront met the Canal & River Trust team caring for this revitalised location, and people enjoying time by its tranquil waters.



Tom

Gloucester born and bred, history graduate, Tom, is duty manager for our museum. He says: "I've always loved social history and knowing where you've come from. We're just celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the Llanthony transhipment warehouse that houses the museum. It once stored six and a half thousand tonnes of grain across six floors. Each merchant rented a floor of grain before moving it by canal to the Midlands."



Misbah

Misbah only recently arrived in Gloucester from Pakistan to complete her PhD at Hartpury University, which specialises in agriculture and veterinary science. "I love it here already," she tells us. "I'm staying with a lovely family and enjoying exploring the docks. My PhD shows how Artificial Intelligence can monitor animals and identify behaviour that indicates illness or infection. It's a quick way for cows to tell us they are poorly."



Andy, Tatania, Jairo, Janine and Diana

After weeding the cobbled docks all morning, our volunteers share their story over tea. Diana says: "I like working outside near water, not sitting at home. I've met lots of lovely people including Tatania and Jairo from Nicaragua. They are good workers but can't work until asylum is approved. It's a shame. Tatania is a talented chef. We call Jairo 'Speedy Gonzales' because he never stops."



Mark and Ruth

After a ride aboard the former Dunkirk 'little ship' Queen Boadicea II, we meet this Kiwi couple back on shore. Ruth says: "We're doing a short tour of the Cotswolds. It's been really interesting to learn about the docks and their heritage. Our country isn't as old, so we love learning about where our ancestors came from. I'm a rower, so over the next few days I'll be sculling down the Thames from Oxford to Weybridge."



Dave

The docks are a base for Dave's operations team who care for the locks and bridges of the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal: "The lift bridges go up when anything bigger than a canoe comes through. So we're the ones stopping all the traffic! We get a lot of boaters going from Saul Junction to the ship graveyard at Purton, as you can do the round trip in a day. I'm a chatterbox and I love looking after our customers. On a sunny day like this, where else would you rather be?"



Valkyrie

Gloucester is the last place you expect to meet the next Jon Bon Jovi, but Valkyrie is sure he's a rock star in the making: "I've got a guitar and I'm into 80s 'Hair' bands like Van Halen and Mötley Crüe," he says, explaining that he's trying to get a band together. "I've come down here to meet mates in one of the dockside bars. The water is really nice and peaceful. I'm happy because I've just been offered a job. There was only one answer, when they asked who I aspired to be."



© Waterways Archive



Keeping Anderton's history alive

As you may have seen from our appeal leaflet today, we're determined to protect the unique heritage of the Anderton Boat Lift for the nation. Truly a one-off, this wonder of the waterways was the world's first commercial boat lift. But when you look into the chequered history of the lift, this won't be the first time its future has been in question.

The lift was first conceived in the 19th century. As the region's salt mining and pottery-making industries thrived, Anderton Basin became a major trans-shipping exchange, with goods such as clay, salt and coal flowing between the River Weaver and the Trent & Mersey Canal. To maximise their profits, trustees of the Weaver Navigation decided to create a permanent link between the two waterways and in 1870, they hired renowned civil engineer, Edward Leader Williams.

After initial plans for an elaborate lock system were scrapped, Williams enlisted the services of fellow engineer, Edwin Clark, an expert

in hydraulics, to help him design and build what would become the country's first major commercial boat lift. Opened in 1875, Anderton Boat Lift was hailed as a marvel of the age. Nicknamed the Cathedral of the Canals, the lift carried boats 50 feet in the air, transporting them between the River Weaver and the Trent & Mersey Canal using two giant, hydraulically powered caissons or tanks.

Clark's hydraulic system, groundbreaking at the time, would later prove problematic, as polluted, salty water from the canal led to serious corrosion. In 1908, to remedy the situation, the boat lift was converted to electricity and a

brand-new structure was erected over the badly corroded hydraulic lift.

Anderton Boat Lift continued to provide a vital link for the next 75 years, and in 1976 it was scheduled as an Ancient Monument by English Heritage. However, in the post-war years, traffic on the route dwindled. In 1983, after it began to fail, Cheshire's Cathedral of the Canals finally closed.

After two decades in the doldrums, and following the construction of a new visitor centre, it was officially reopened to considerable fanfare in 2003, as the then Prince of Wales, HRH King Charles III, cut the ribbon to herald a new beginning for this historic structure. Since then,

the boat lift has become one of the most popular attractions on our network, carrying thousands of visitors every year between the Trent & Mersey Canal and the River Weaver.

Unfortunately, the last 20 years have taken their toll on this 150-year-old structure, and without your support, this 'wonder of the waterways' could once again slip into disuse and disrepair. With your help, our charity can preserve this vital piece of our canal heritage to keep this iconic boat lift running for generations to come.

Keep Anderton Boat Lift Alive
Donate now
canalrivertrust.org.uk/keepandertonalive



© Lynn Pegler

Lighting up communities

On urban canals in Walsall, Sandwell and Smethwick, community roots engagement coordinator Lutfur Rahman is working with local partners to bring diverse communities closer to canals nearby. With support from players of People's Postcode Lottery, together they are putting on events, activities and experiences by water to encourage people to care for their local stretch.

"My job is to connect people to their local canal," reflects Lutfur, "helping them realise they have a wonderful space nearby and encouraging them to get involved as volunteers and take ownership of it." Having worked as a community cohesion officer for ten years before joining our charity, Lutfur is already well-known in the local Bengali, Gujarati, and Afro-Caribbean communities. However, there are still challenges in getting people engaged.

"Some people say the canal is not safe. But we're working to dispel that myth and show them that the canal is a nice place to be, where you can refresh your mind and get involved." Some visit the canal as individuals and families, attending the incredible 233 events he helped to put on during the last year. There's been Let's Fish! sessions, paddleboarding, kayaking, bell boating, family fun days and Diwali celebrations lighting up the famous Galton Bridge.

Other established community groups are helping to improve local canals. They include WASUP (Walsall Against Single Use Plastics), EcoSikh UK, Lions Club Sandwell, and Smethwick's famous Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Europe's largest place of worship for Sikhs. Some groups have adopted their own canal stretch, giving our charity much-needed help with maintenance.

Community engagement activities are invaluable as they encourage people to volunteer in litter picks, deliver towpath improvements and help out on wildlife



Lutfur works with a wide variety of people in his local area

conservation projects. Not least because volunteering often improves the wellbeing of the people taking part. It's a great way to enjoy fresh air, exercise, meet other people and feel part of a close community, in areas where health inequalities are deep-rooted. By helping people care for canals, Lutfur is helping them take care of themselves.

And time by water is good for Lutfur too: "Sometimes you feel like you're not working because you enjoy it so much. When I'm out and about I feel vibrant, energetic, and much calmer."

With Lutfur's good work being supported by the amazing players of People's Postcode Lottery, this impact will continue even in light of the funding challenges our charity is facing. As he reflects: "This support is vital, people will always need better health and wellbeing, and the canal is where they can find it."



"Some people say the canal is not safe. But we're working to dispel that myth and show them that the canal is a nice place to be, where you can refresh your mind and get involved."

Lutfur Rahman



Thank you for all your support

It's always a pleasure to hear how much you're appreciated. So we just wanted to say a big thank you to all our Friends and supporters for everything you do. You help us protect and maintain the 2,000 miles of our 250-year-old network, for everyone who uses canals, from boaters to runners and paddleboarders to dog-walkers.

As well as keeping the rich history of canals alive, you're also giving wildlife a sanctuary across a unique mix of habitats and creating corridors for nature. More than ever, our canals can play a vital part in all our lives and thanks to your passion we can ensure they continue to thrive today and for future generations.

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