

Transforming canals through gifts in Wills

Gifts in Wills
Impact Report 2024/25



Thanks to the generosity of gifts in Wills supporters

Today, we thank and celebrate everyone who has so kindly left a gift in their Will and share how their wonderful generosity has supported vital work across the network over the last year. It's inspiring to know that these legacies are restoring, regenerating, and revitalising the canals we all love and cherish.

This report outlines just a few of the many ways these gifts are helping to keep over 2,000 miles of canals open and alive and protecting their heritage for us all to enjoy. At a time when our climate is changing, government funding is falling, and the costs of maintaining our canals are rising so fast, gifts in Wills are more vital than ever. We simply couldn't protect the thousands of locks, bridges, aqueducts and iconic wonders of the waterways, like Anderton Boat Lift, without them.

Understandably, our gifts in Wills income varies from year to year – this year it totalled almost £350,000, and we're delighted that the number of amazing supporters who want to make a pledge to our charity continues to grow, helping us to look ahead and rise to the challenge of an uncertain future for our canals.

Every penny given is accounted for, whether these kind gifts are used where they are needed most – which most of our supporters prefer, or in a small number of cases, used to support specific projects that would have meant a great deal to our generous supporters.

Gifts in Wills are helping to keep our canals open and alive



£338,177

generously given through
gifts in Wills in
2024/25

76%



given to
where the need
is greatest

24%



given to spend
on specific
projects

Thanks to lasting legacies left to canals nationwide

Once again, this year gifts in Wills have helped to restore and protect our industrial heritage, saved nature and wildlife along our towpaths and worked to keep our canals and rivers open and accessible for everyone. As we keep track of every pound given, this map shows you where we've put amazing gifts in Wills to work over the past 12 months. Follow the page numbers to read more about each story.

Celebrating Ellesmere's heritage

Thanks to gifts in Wills, our treasured collection and boats have an exciting future
See page 7

A bench by two bridges in Winsford

A fitting tribute to the generosity of Douglas and Kathleen
See page 8

Keeping Banbury open to all

David's generosity kept the town lock open and working
See page 6

Protecting passage over the Pennines

Bank Newton lock near Gargrave now has another 25 years of life ahead
See page 7

Getting to work in Worksop

How George's legacy protected Cuckoo Wharf
See page 4

Blooming canal banks at Ansty

Mo's gift in her Will became a gift to nature
See page 5

Remembering Baggins in Coventry Basin

A much-loved volunteer will now never be forgotten
See page 8

Restoring Peter's Bridge at Braunston

How our volunteers brought a bridge back to life in his memory
See page 8

How to leave a gift in your Will to canals

and celebrate everything they mean to you
See page 11



Thanks to George, we got to work in Worksop

Cuckoo Wharf in Worksop is the site of a well-used towpath through the town, where the Chesterfield Canal's unique brand of narrowboat (locally known as cuckoos) used to stop outside the now Grade II* listed Pickfords Haulage Depository.

However, when cracks and sinkholes began to appear in the towpath, and the wash wall supporting it began to lean towards the canal, major repairs were needed. Thanks to the generosity of one of our kind supporters, George, who left a gift in his Will, funds were made available to deliver those repairs as soon as possible. And as Tom Starkey, our local asset engineer, explains, masonry dating back to the canal's opening in 1777 was reinstated to its former glory.

"This section of the canal is important as it's well-used, both by boaters and the passing public. While the canal was empty of water for other works on the opposite side of the bank, we took the opportunity to put in modern concrete footings and rebuild the wall using the reclaimed original bricks. Back in 1777, simply no foundations for the wall were built at all, which might help to explain why over 250 years later it was starting to sag!"

But now, thanks to George and the hard work of our heritage and engineering teams, the towpath is back to its best, and ready to give passing boaters somewhere to rest for a while.



Cuckoo Wharf courtesy of David Hallam-Jones



Thanks to Mo, our canal banks are blooming

The dog walkers and cyclists of Ansty, north of Coventry, enjoy exploring the countryside along their local North Oxford Canal towpath.

However, the canal often overtops the 200-year-old soft banks after heavy rains, leaving the towpath in a muddy mess. That's why, thanks in part to a gift in Mo's Will, we've recently been able to reinforce the banks and adorn them with wildflowers and reedbeds to support the thriving wildlife.

"We worked carefully with our ecologists as these soft banks are an ideal habitat for water voles," explains regional construction

manager Andy Morris. "Although we raised the bank and reinforced it with pre-made concrete bags, it was important to line the harder banks with coconut matting rolls full of native plants that give water voles somewhere to nest, shelter, and expand their range of habitats."

With a sturdier edge to work from, Andy's team topped the concrete with a soil mix full of native wildflowers, which attract bees and butterflies, but don't require a lot of nutrients to thrive. Then they gave the towpath a long-lasting smooth surface for all to use. It's a win-win for wildlife and people, which we're sure Mo would approve of.



For the love of canals

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We enjoyed many canal holidays with Mo and her husband Bob over 30 years, so much so, they purchased their own small cruiser. A keen photographer, Mo captured many features we passed on our travels, with her eye drawn to urban industrial heritage, bridges, locks, and peaceful rural scenes. Mo's last gift to the waterways reflects many happy memories and a determination to help secure the future of our canals for the enjoyment of generations to come.

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Friends Rick and Jane

Thanks to David, Banbury's Town Lock is open to all

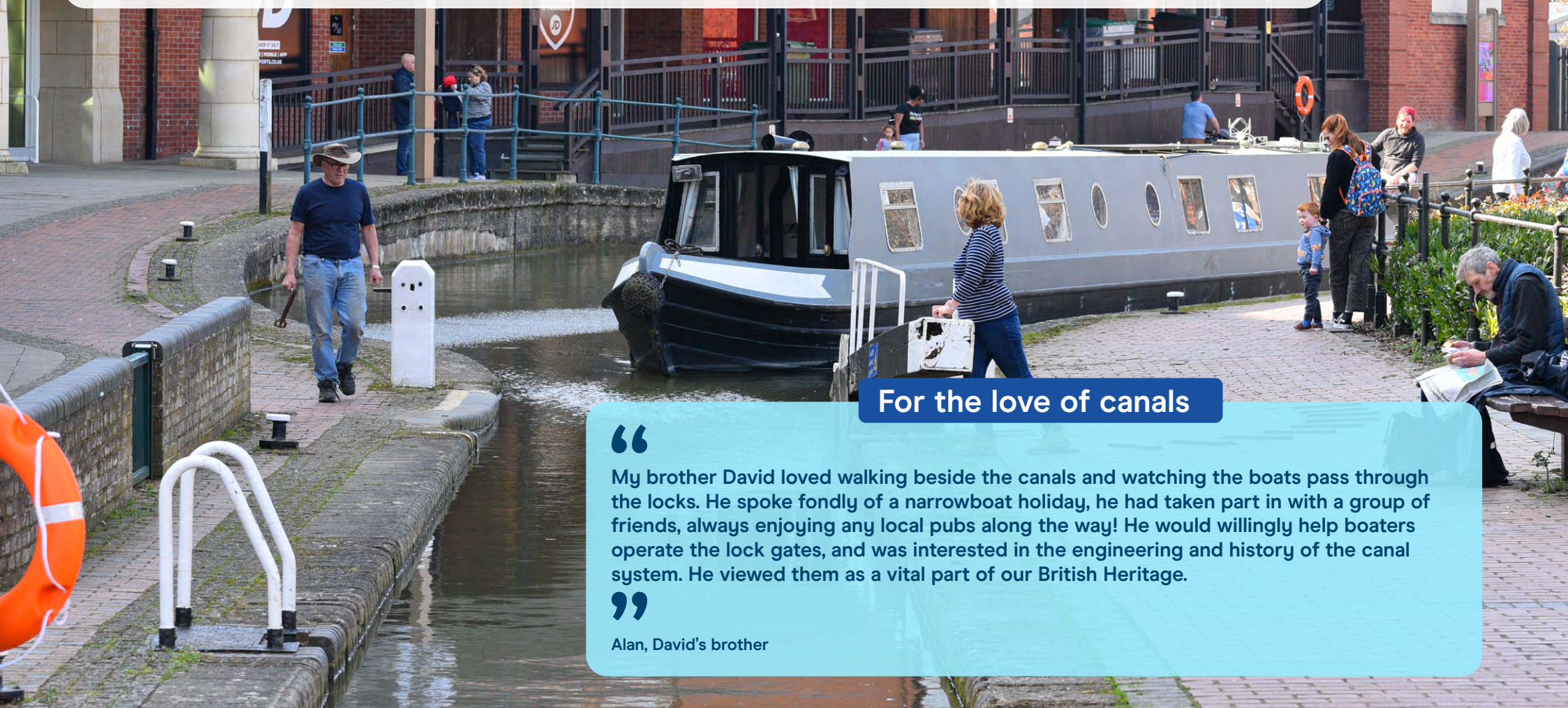
Further south along the busy Oxford Canal, Banbury is a gateway for boaters eager to reach the dreaming spires of the university city and its connections to the Thames.

When the Town Lock's top gate failed last summer, it became especially urgent to replace it. The single gate had reached its 25-year lifespan, so after temporary bracings were installed, our Stanley Ferry lock gate workshop commissioned a replacement for the following winter.

Thanks to a generous gift from David's Will, plans quickly progressed. However, installation in a bustling town was not

straightforward. The gate was floated into position on a workboat equipped with a crane, and the lock had to be drained with a temporary dam built to hold back the canal water.

While replacing the gates, our team also made repairs to the cills, coping stones and stop plank grooves to future-proof the lock until the next gate replacement in years to come. In the meantime, it's fitting that someone like David, who loved narrowboating, engineering and historic canals, will help many more boaters cruise through Banbury for another 25 years.



For the love of canals

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My brother David loved walking beside the canals and watching the boats pass through the locks. He spoke fondly of a narrowboat holiday, he had taken part in with a group of friends, always enjoying any local pubs along the way! He would willingly help boaters operate the lock gates, and was interested in the engineering and history of the canal system. He viewed them as a vital part of our British Heritage.

”

Alan, David's brother

Thanks to gifts in Wills, canal heritage lives on



Opening up clues to our collection

Thanks in part to our generous supporters, a new exhibition at the National Waterways Museum in Ellesmere Port is tempting budding detectives to explore our collections. The family-friendly Store Detectives installation at the Island Warehouse encourages families to look for significant objects from canal history. By searching with magnifying glasses and an ultraviolet torch, young visitors can discover 'secret signs' pointing them to crucial evidence.



Keeping heritage boats alive

Gifts left in Wills are also helping to give some of our most treasured heritage boats a future. Our wooden-bottomed horse-drawn boat, 'Ilkeston' has just had many planks in the bottom of her hull replaced. Meanwhile, 'Gifford' is being repainted by the highly respected boat painter Phil Speight.

A new metal cradle for our rare river tug, 'Aleida', should also help to keep her stable and protected for many years to come.



Protecting passage over the Pennines

To the west of Gargrave, where the Leeds & Liverpool Canal crosses the peak of the Pennines, stands the Grade II-listed Lock 41 at Bank Newton. Last Christmas, the kindness of gifts in Wills helped replace its leaking bottom gate. Now, the oak gates, hand-built in our workshop to be like for like, will keep boating traffic moving on this important Yorkshire and Lancashire border flight for another generation to come.

Thanks for the memories

How we're remembering those who left
a gift in their Will to our charity

A bench by two bridges

Beside the River Weaver near Winsford in Cheshire, are two beautiful bridges, overlooked by an oak bench dedicated to the memory of Douglas and his wife Kathleen. As our last impact report explained, their legacy funded the bridge renovations. And now their friends Cindy, John, and Anna have helped us install a bench close by. "Douglas and Kathleen would be delighted that their legacy lives on here," they told us. "It's so nice to have somewhere to sit and remember them."

A welcome tribute to 'Baggins' in Coventry Basin

You might also recall the story of Ian from our previous report. Our welcome station at Coventry Basin now honours the life of this dedicated canal volunteer, affectionately known as 'Baggins' by everyone who knew him. The new plaque is a fitting tribute to a man who lived and breathed our canals. In his final years, he devoted himself to reviving his local canal and all involved in the Community Roots project in Coventry remember him as a true friend.



Peter remembered in bricks and mortar at Braunston

Thanks to the generosity of Peter, who loved the canal running through his home village, Bridge 91a near Braunston Marina has now been fully repointed, painted, and resurfaced. Our volunteers have carried out most of the brickwork restoration using traditional lime mortar techniques learned from colleagues based at Welford Wharf. Now, our volunteers plan to continue repointing bridges further along the canal, keeping the skills Peter helped them learn alive.



Thanks to Margaret for her pledge to the canals she loves

In her late seventies, Margaret is still cruising our waterways, living aboard her narrowboat, 'Will o' the Wisp'. After kindly pledging a gift in her Will to our charity, Margaret tells us more about a life lived well by water.

"In my twenties and early thirties, my husband and I lived on a converted RNLI rescue lifeboat in the Thames estuary. I've adored the boating life ever since.

Later in life, I moved onto a canal boat and consider Staffordshire my home now. I wouldn't go back on land. I think I would feel trapped. Having that sense of freedom and being close to nature is wonderful.

I'm in my late seventies now, but if I get too old to cruise, my plan is to find a private mooring and have a houseboat, where friends and family can come to stay.

Last year, the Trust didn't mow the land around my mooring, so many wildflowers, butterflies, damselflies and birds sprang up around me. It was just so beautiful, like something I remember from childhood. In the future that's what I'd like to see continue by the canal, thanks to my legacy."



Planning to leave a gift in your Will to our charity?

Please let us know, we'd love to thank you personally!

Leaving a gift in your Will to the Canal & River Trust is a lasting tribute of your connection with canals and rivers – helping to keep them alive so they can be enjoyed and cherished by generations to come.

We're launching our legacy society – founded in recognition and appreciation of our special pledgers who want to leave a mark on the canals they love with a lasting gift in their Will.

The society is a dedicated community of supporters who care deeply about the future of canals and rivers. Members will be invited to join us for exclusive behind-the-scenes events, connect with our experts and leadership team, and see first-hand how gifts are helping to keep canals alive – protecting heritage, wildlife and precious memories.

For the love of canals

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I guess my legacy pledge is about our whole family's love of canals – even my grandchildren's who now come out on walks with me to spot kingfishers and other wildlife. I'd like my gift to be used to make sure canals are there for future generations.

”

Bryan





We're here to help

You may have met our small but mighty team – Kelly hosts our fabulous discovery events, and you'll often find Emily giving a warm welcome at the registration point. You might've even had a laugh at Tash lugging our events PA system around!

We love enjoying a cuppa with our fantastic supporters like you, and we'd love to hear from you if you ever want to chat all things canals, rivers or our work. If you'd like any support with your Will, including leaving a gift, we're here to help too.

Did you know?

- You can add a gift to our charity using our Codicil form – there's no need to rewrite your Will. This form simply helps you include a gift in your Will using our charity's details
- If you don't have a Will, we can help you write one for free through our partners at Farewill and the National Free Wills Network, either in person or at your home

There's absolutely no obligation to leave a gift to our charity, but we hope you'll consider passing on your love of canals to future generations. Please get in touch at giftsinwills@canalrivertrust.org.uk or by calling **07918 889822**.

After seeing the impact of gifts in Wills

If you have any questions about leaving your
own gift, we're always delighted to help

It's easy to get in touch

Call: 07918 889822

Email: giftsinwills@canalrivertrust.org.uk

Visit: canalrivertrust.org.uk/giftsinwills