

Waterfront

The Canal & River Trust Magazine

Stepping into the breach

How your support helped us respond after the Llangollen incident

A passion for canals

Meet our new Chief Executive, Campbell Robb.

Inside a treasure trove

Take a look at our hidden archive of heritage narrow boats



Welcome

As the first hopeful signs of spring appear along our towpaths, it feels like the perfect moment to pause and reflect. From winter repairs to the care of wildlife and historic locks, your support has kept our canals open, helping nature, history and communities thrive.

Every story in this edition of Waterfront has your generosity at its heart. We take you behind the scenes of some of the biggest stories on our canals, including how your generosity helped us respond to the major breach on the Llangollen Canal. Thanks to you, our teams were able to support boaters through an unsettling time and begin the careful work of restoring this historic waterway. It's a powerful reminder of the immediate impact your kindness has.

You'll also hear from our new Chief Executive, Campbell Robb, as he shares his passion for canals and his belief in their future. His reflections highlight something we know to be true: when people care about canals, they protect them. That commitment is evident in every conversation we have with you, our community of Friends.

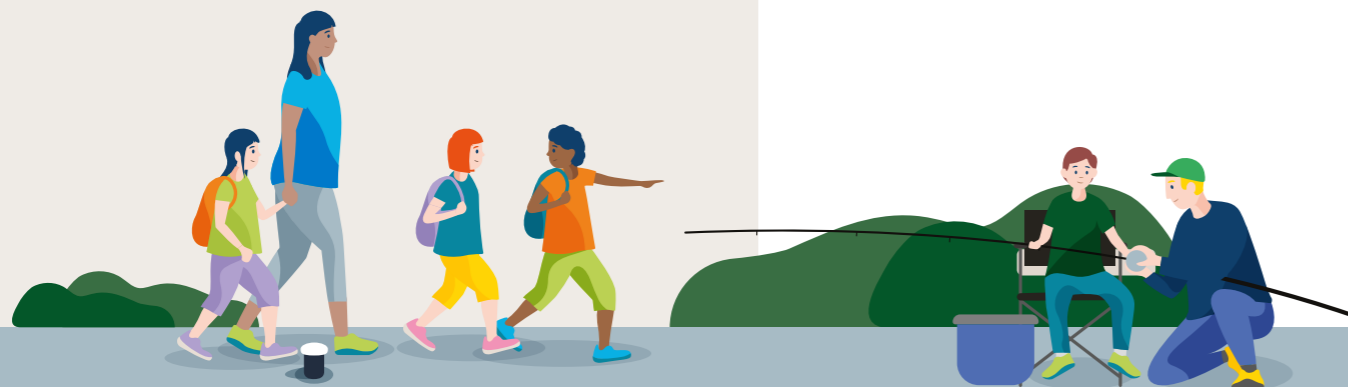
Thanks to you, we can protect the places that matter so deeply to you: the waterways that sustain nature, history, community, and so many personal connections. You are not just reading about our canals; you are part of their story.

You'll hear first-hand from the engineers, ecologists, community teams and volunteers who care for our canals every day, alongside stories from Friends who share your deep connection to our waterways. I hope as you read, you feel proud of what you have helped protect.

Thank you for everything your support makes possible. Because of you, our canals can move from the hardest days of winter into the promise of brighter seasons ahead.



Rebecca Knight
Supporter Care Manager



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We love seeing your photos and hearing your canal stories. If you've captured a special moment or memory, please get in touch. While we can't feature everything in Waterfront, we truly value every submission and enjoy seeing our waterways through your eyes.

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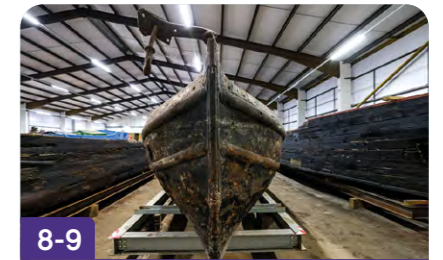
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Stepping into the breach

On 22 December 2025, the heartbreaking breach at Whitchurch on the Llangollen Canal caused significant damage. Thanks to your support, we were ready to respond immediately with swift, caring, and decisive action. As work continues, we go behind the scenes with project manager Simon Harding to see how your donations are helping us manage this major incident.

“In the immediate aftermath, our priority was the people whose boats went down,” says Simon. “All of a sudden, their lives and homes were thrown into turmoil just before Christmas. The outpouring of support and donations showed your deep compassion for those affected. Your gifts are now helping to put things right for them.”

Working with the emergency services, our teams looked after the people and boats affected, secured the site, used stop planks to hold back water, and assessed the damage. Your support keeps these teams trained, equipped and ready 24/7, 365 days a year.

Following our emergency protocols, senior Canal & River Trust leaders and the local water company quickly agreed plans to pump water around the breach. This was crucial to keep the canal downstream in water, and to continue supplying 50 million litres of water a day to 60,000 homes in Cheshire.

The very next day, on Christmas Eve, more permanent dams and water pipes were installed to keep water flowing.

We then focused on rescuing the boats caught in the breach. ‘Pacemaker’, the boat on its brink, was soon safely pulled back using a specialist tracked winch. Over Christmas and New Year, you supported a complex and careful recovery of all three craft. By mid-January, they were safely in local boat yards for repairs.

Throughout this time, Simon and his team worked 14-hour days, seven days a week. They were busy caring for boat owners, maintaining water pumps, securing road and land access for heavy machinery, and keeping boaters and businesses affected by the closure fully informed.

Attention now turns to investigating why the breach happened and designing repairs. Causes remain unclear, but Simon suspects that clues can be found in local history and geology, as is often the case with our ageing network.

“When this embankment was built over 200 years ago,” he says: “the only available local materials were open sandy soils. Due to its very nature, water seeps through sand, making leaks hard to detect, even with the most up-to-date engineering assessments.”

Work has already begun on designing a robust and resilient repair. Simon believes multiple layers of different materials could rebuild the steep slopes before the canal itself is relined, strengthened, and restored.

With repairs expected to run through most of 2026 and cost several million pounds, your ongoing support will be essential. **Together, we can bring this iconic canal back to life and make sure it remains a place of joy for all who love it.**

“In my 30 years on canals, we’ve never had a breach involving boats like this before. Thankfully, it’s a relatively rare incident, but will be expensive and complicated to fix. So we’re grateful for your donations to help the boats affected and get this historic canal back open soon.”

Julie Sharman, chief operating officer

Our team worked through Christmas and into the New Year to clear the breach and refloat boats around it



To donate and support our work, visit canalrivertrust.org.uk/support-us

A passion for the potential of canals.

Our new chief executive, Campbell Robb, has hit the ground running. In his first few months, he's immersed himself in our mission. Here he shares his passion for our canals and why he's excited about their future.



“Friends, supporters and volunteers like you are central to everything we do; without your support and commitment, our work wouldn't be possible.”

I joined the Canal & River Trust for many reasons, the incredible history of the network; one of the world's great pieces of industrial heritage, still living and woven into everyday life. And its future, canals endure because they matter: they connect communities, history and nature. I'm excited to help shape what comes next.

I've visited some remarkable places that show just how important our canal network is to people. One was the Festival of Lights on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, marking its 225th anniversary, where thousands came together to celebrate.



Campbell deep in conversation at the Brecon Light Parade on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal

Seeing Year 10 physics students, exploring how hydraulics, bridges and canals work when I visited Canary Wharf, was truly inspiring. Seeing them learn in such a hands-on way highlighted the importance of our community outreach.

Facing Today's Challenges

I am clear about the vital role canals play and the challenges they face, and this came sharply into focus at this winter's Llangollen Canal breach.

It was a reminder of the difficulties in caring for such an old network and highlighted the remarkable skills and dedication across the Trust. For me as the new CEO, it was



Llangollen breach response team at work

powerful to see our teams working in tough conditions, around the clock, over Christmas and New Year.

Caring for boaters was our priority and we're now focused on putting things right.

I was grateful for the messages of support, offers of help and donations, they were hugely appreciated.

These moments of support reflect the deep connection people have with our canals. Whether through learning, celebration or simply time by the water, they show the valuable roles canals play in our lives. This is echoed in our report, *A Vital Connector for Nature and People*, which highlights that canals are often our closest link to nature.

Looking to the Future

For over 250 years, canals have evolved, from moving coal and goods to the many ways they're used today. But climate change, ageing infrastructure and rising costs are real threats. That's why it's fundamental we have a clear view of their future and what they need to become next.

We don't face that challenge alone. Our ability to adapt is strengthened by the support of Friends, boaters, volunteers and communities across the network.

From moving water from where it's plentiful to where it's needed, to new ways of modernising and maintaining the network, canals have always adapted and they can do so again.

I want to finish by saying how deeply grateful I am for your commitment and support. Together, we can look after our canals and help them thrive today and long into the future.

Inside our hidden treasure trove.

Thanks to your gifts, more than 60 vessels are protected and preserved in our historic narrowboat collection. Most can still be seen at our museums, but 14 very special boats are kept in dry-storage archive near Ellesmere Port, which few people ever get to see. Come with us, as we pull back the curtain and invite you to step inside.



Help keep canal heritage alive
canalrivertrust.org.uk/donate

The entire collection survives thanks to an incredible group of canal enthusiasts who first brought it together. When these volunteers first opened what is now the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port in 1976, they rescued as many important heritage boats as they could find.

Over time, the floating collection grew, and it soon became too large and costly to manage. Many of these truly historic boats were leaking, sinking or falling into disrepair.

That's why, in 2017, we secured funding from Arts Council England. Since then, over £1 million has helped remove the most significant boats from the water and preserve them in our dry storage facility. Without this decisive action, many of these unique, irreplaceable vessels could have been lost forever.

"The boats we saved are very special," explains our guide and collections technician, Alec Swain. "There are 14 boats stored here, each with its own unique story to tell. Collectively, they document the evolution of narrowboat building in Britain, from the early 19th century to the 1950s, tracing the transition from wooden-hulled boats to fully steel-hulled boats, step by step."

"It's an imperfect comparison," he admits: "but these boats are so historically significant they carry the same designation as the mask of Tutankhamun, so it's just as vital to preserve them. The difference is these boats have been in water, or, in some cases, underwater, for many years."

Thanks to £40,000 a year from Friends like you, Alec and his specialist conservation volunteering team are conserving our precious boats for the future. Without your support, they might have slowly rotted or rusted away.

As Alec points out, rule number one in museum conservation is to keep water away from historic objects. Thanks to your vital support, the team are able to dry out the timbers, preserve them with special chemical treatments and manage the temperature and humidity in the store. You've already helped reroof, clean, paint, and upgrade the store in recent years, giving these remarkable pieces of history a more stable future.

But the future of fragile, easily damaged historic objects is never certain, and Alec has plenty of ideas for even better preservation.

"We're hoping to create 3D computer models of all the boats. Once these baseline images are captured, we can repeat the process two or three years later to create heat maps showing any cracks or damage that need attention and preservation. Improved humidity or

temperature control systems could also help slow natural deterioration. But these ideas go far beyond current budgets and business plans, so we would need extra support to make it all happen."

Although our store is unlikely to ever be fully open to the public, Alec and the team would love the opportunity to invite you inside in the future. In the meantime, your support will continue to protect these vital pieces of canal history for generations to come.

"It costs around £2,000 a year to care for each boat. Because of you they're protected from rust and decay, so these much loved pieces of our waterways' history will be here for future generations."

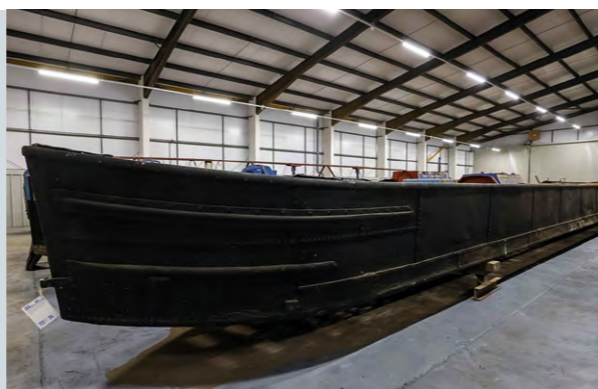
Alec Swain
Collections technician

Three hidden treasures



Manchester, 1874

Built for the Bridgwater Navigation Co, steam-powered tugs like these were urgently needed at the time due to an epidemic affecting horses, which brought canal traffic and trade to a halt.



Phoebe, age unknown

A rare surviving example of an unpowered 'Joey' boat, once part of a vast fleet on the Birmingham Canal Navigations. Some say these boats were named after the Victorian industrialist and former Mayor of Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain.



Wye, 1959

A steel butty, built for British Waterways as one of the last of their commercial carrying fleet. Its hold includes a shipping container, a poignant reminder of the canal's attempts to compete with road haulage.

Our canals' place in nature.

In nature, every living thing has its place in the ecosystem. Our new report, 'The Vital Connector for Nature and People', shows just how important canals are for the restoring of wildlife and supporting the wellbeing of the communities who live alongside them. It also outlines how you've helped us hugely improve green spaces and bring wildlife into the heart of our cities.

"The aim of the report was to show the full picture; how nature is struggling and how people are losing their connection to the outdoors. Canals can act as the thread that ties the wellbeing of wildlife and communities back together", explains Richard Bennett, our nature recovery manager, and one of the authors.

"Thanks to you, we've always helped nature to thrive on canals, by protecting and creating habitats. Even in big cities, we've improved green canal spaces to bring wildlife closer to where people live. Being able to do both is our superpower. It's what makes the work we do, together with your support, so important."

Written with respected conservation and health academics, the report paints a worrying picture of a twin-crisis at the heart of the UK. Wildlife has suffered from a huge loss of habitats and biodiversity. At the same time, people are becoming increasingly disconnected from nature and are facing a worrying decline in wellbeing. Compared to 14 similar European countries, the UK ranks close to the bottom on all these measures.

The report also identifies an "ecological void" across parts of the Midlands, in cities like Birmingham, Leicester, Nottingham and Stoke-on-Trent. These areas have few protected nature sites, yet are home to millions of people who urgently need access to green space.

Yet these cities are exactly where miles of canals offer a unique 'corridor' for wildlife, connecting up pockets of

habitat and helping nature spread. In many urban areas, our canals and towpaths already offer a huge variety of waterside habitats, including wet banksides, rich hedgerows, and wildflower grasslands. The challenge now is improving these habitats in areas where people urgently need more wildlife on their doorstep too.

This is where we rely on the help of partners, Friends and supporters like you. From restoring hedgerows, to eradicating invasive weeds, improving water quality or building fish passes, there are so many ways your donations are already helping us bring more nature back to our canals.

With so much vital work needed to keep our canals open, and with government funding falling away, your support is more vital than ever.

That's why Richard and his team are carefully identifying places in and around the Midlands, where your gifts could have the biggest impact. Our canals can be the 'Vital Connectors' that links wider efforts to help wildlife recover and give people more wild places to enjoy. This is especially true when we also work closely with partners like Natural England, local councils, and the Wildlife Trusts.

With your support, our expert ecologists, experienced staff, passionate volunteers, and local communities are ready to power the recovery of wildlife and make a real difference to our nation's health and wellbeing.



To download and read our report please visit canalrivertrust.org.uk/vital-connector



"Our canals are living arteries that play an essential role in supporting nature's recovery and in forging meaningful connections between people and the natural world.

We invite you to join with us in this vital work. Together, let's be the champions that our canals deserve."

David Orr CBE
Canal and River Trust Chair

Your support helped install floating wildflower and ecosystems in the heart of Nottingham



Rooting for local people

In Nottingham, you're helping our engagement coordinator, Carol Burrell, transform places and change lives. Through our community roots programme she's reaching out across the city to boost people's health and happiness on their local canal.



Our community roots team reach out to many different communities across the city.

Our Community Roots programme works very much from the ground up. Thanks to your support and funds raised by players of People's Postcode Lottery, it introduces canals to people who might not otherwise spend time by water. By sharing the joys of canals, the programme encourages the community to come together, volunteer and protect our waterways for the future.

In Nottingham, that's exactly what Carol has achieved with remarkable success. She began by understanding what was stopping people from coming to our canals. For many black women, this stemmed from a fear of water and never having learned to swim.

Carol set out to remove this barrier with 'Swim Sista Swim'. This award-winning learn to swim programme for African and Caribbean Black women, has helped nearly a hundred women gain confidence in water. Many have gone on to paddle on the Nottingham & Beeston Canal. And as Carol explains, some, like Sharon Thomas, are now Canal & River Trust volunteers.

"Sharon was more scared of water than anyone, but she soon found her confidence and the courage to join our canoeing sessions on the canal. Later, she volunteered to become a swimming instructor and give back to her group. By teaching others, she's runner up for our Volunteer of the Year award."

But swimming was only ever the beginning. Groups are now enjoying canoeing on the canal, taking foraging walks along the towpath, and learning traditional arts and crafts. They now also volunteer to care for a canal community garden in the city centre.

The programme has brought together community groups from across the city to

enjoy canoeing and paddleboarding sessions. Along with young people from the King's Trust, they help clear invasive weeds, pick litter and many are now keen to volunteer in future.

Then there's Epic Partners, who inspire and mentor kids from marginalised areas of the city. These young people have loved taking part in narrowboat trips, paddling days, bug hunting and forest skills activities, and they are eager to do even more.

To support this growing engagement, the Trust will be opening a permanent waterside hub, providing a welcoming base for all groups and a home for the paddling equipment.

This transformation began with your support, helping us to build the programme from the roots up. With so many people getting involved in caring for the canal in Nottingham, it's thanks to people like you, who care so passionately about keeping canals alive, that it now feels so much more welcoming, well-used and full of life.

"Before Swim Sista Swim I had an immense fear of water, but now I'm teaching others how to swim myself. Canoeing on the canal gave me a different view of the outdoors. My physical and emotional health has improved, and I feel more confident taking my grandchildren by the water."



Sharon Thomas, swim assistant, Canal & River Trust and runner up for our Volunteer of the Year award

Lock paddle pledge makes progress

Simple but ingenious, lock paddles are vital to keep boats moving through our locks today, just as they were hundreds of years ago. And having pledged to fix more paddles, more quickly, we're now well on course to keep that promise.

To understand why this matters, it helps to know how paddles work. If you've ever seen a boater filling or emptying a lock, what they are actually doing is opening a paddle. As these 'doors' open, water enters the lock to lift boats or escapes to lower them. Some paddles are located within lock gates, while others are positioned on the side of a lock wall. Most are operated by a simple lifting mechanism of rods and cogs, turned by a boater's or volunteer lock keeper's windlass.

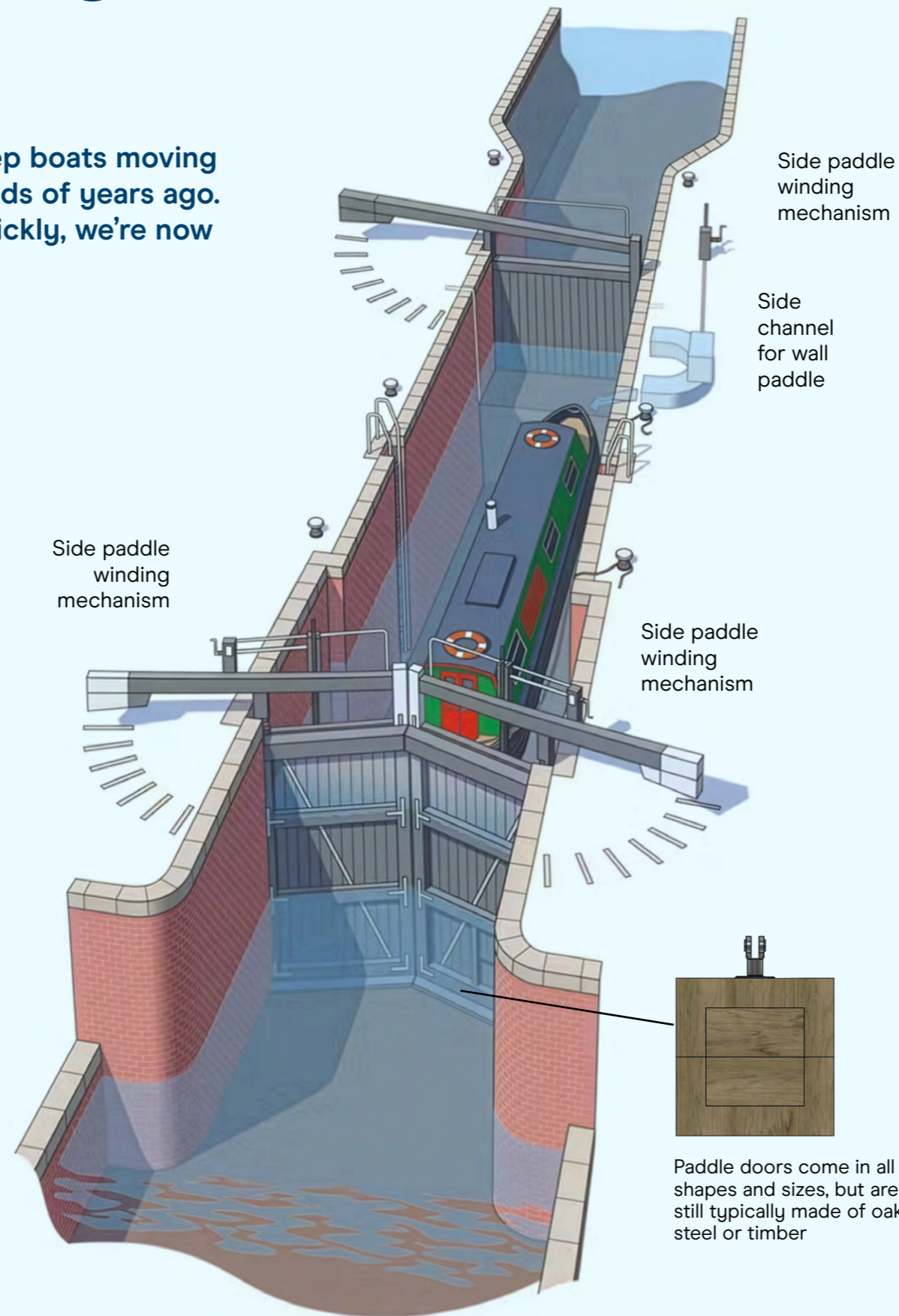
When paddles break, get stuck, or are damaged and need repair, they can delay boaters. Your vital support helps us work every day to maintain canals and are now actively helping us deliver on our commitment to fixing paddles even faster to ensure our locks are always easy to navigate.

"This time last year, we had a backlog of around 145 paddles needing repair across 1,500 locks on our network," explains senior project manager, Tracey Jackson. "But as of now, we have cleared about two-thirds of that backlog. That number will continue to increase as many repairs are still underway as part of our winter works programme."

"As paddles are in constant use, we are working to resolve all new paddle issues within four weeks. We're now hitting that target 89% of the time. Our national monitoring system tracks in real time, alerting us to new repairs needed and helping us deliver existing repairs on time."

Tracey is passionate about making a difference: "That's what gets me up in the morning – knowing I'm making things better for our boaters. It's working very well, with our whole team really focused on getting these paddles fixed. We've invested in these works because it was a number one priority. And thanks to everyone who supports our waterways, we've been able to make this a priority."

But Tracey admits it's no easy task: "Lock paddles generally sit underwater, so we often need to dewater a lock to see the problem or send divers down to assess it.



One of our operatives fixing a paddle door

Even then, like lock gates, few paddles are identical. So, we rely on our colleagues at our lock gate workshops to make them to measure."

Simon Turner, our national workshops manager, picks up the story: "Traditionally, paddles were made of elm, a wonderful timber that virtually lasts forever underwater, but Dutch Elm disease ended that. Today, thanks to your support, we make paddles from materials like oak and steel. You also help us supply the rods and cogs that lift the paddles. The Canal & River Trust holds historical casting patterns for all the different iron cogs we need. These are then produced in small local foundries, but in future your gifts could help us explore new technology to modernise their manufacture and make it even easier to fix paddles quickly."

It all shows that every element of our infrastructure plays a huge role in keeping canals open. It's thanks to your support, that we can continue to work harder than ever to protect all our lock paddles and make the whole process run smoothly.

"We're confident that by spring, when more boaters are out and about, all long-term broken paddles issues should be cleared."

Tracey Jackson, senior project manager

To see our paddle progress, visit canalrivertrust.org.uk/better-boating-basics

A gentleman of Greenford

It's always inspiring to hear why our Friends support our canals. For John Gilbert, being a Friend is his way of giving back to the peaceful waterways that shaped his life, supported his wellbeing, and brought nature right to his doorstep.

His story is a powerful reminder of how deeply canals become part of who we are, and why supporting them matters. "I still live in Greenford, in the house I grew up in with nature and water right on my doorstep," says John, explaining where his connection to canals comes from. "I've always cycled along the towpaths where Brent River Park meets the Grand Union Canal."

"Of course, in the past, much of the canal was derelict, but there were still some great, quiet, green spaces full of wildlife. Enjoying the simple pleasures of life has always been part of my ethos. When my children were young, we'd cycle on canals to help them appreciate nature too.

It's good to see how the Canal & River Trust has now helped transform the canals of West London. There's been so much development along the canal, and the towpaths are now much more enjoyable to use."

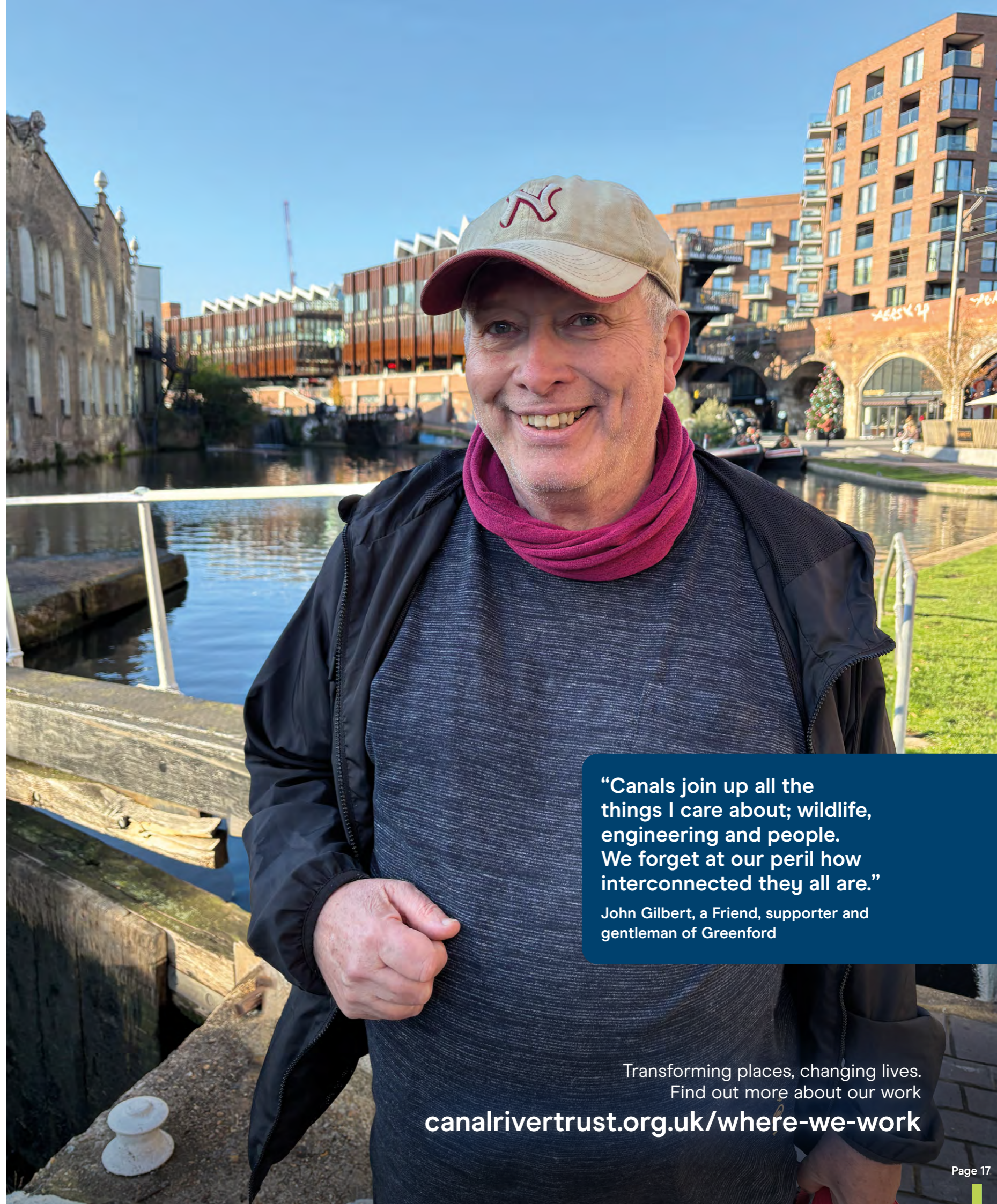
As well as a love of nature, our canals have also helped John explore his love of engineering. At one point, he even bought a narrowboat to set up a bike repair business on the towpath. "I hate waste, and love tinkering with bikes or anything to understand how it works," he says. Now retired, he's involved in many projects, including an idea to create vertical community gardens using discarded tyres, some of which are rescued from the canal!

John speaks openly about the role canals have played in supporting his mental health over the years. "There were times when just seeing the moorhens or coots on the canal reminded me how beautiful life can be. The waterways have always been an escape, a place to find peace in a noisy city." With a smile, he adds: "I am a bit older, a bit creakier perhaps, but grateful. It's been a charmed life."

For John, becoming a Friend felt like the most natural step: "Nowadays I'm a Friend because I know how important my support is to help keep canals alive. They keep me connected to nature, industry, and the people I love."

He explains how reading the Trust's new nature report (see page 10) only strengthened that commitment: "I've always loved how canals bring nature right into the city, onto the doorsteps of people like me. The Grand Union has been such a big part of my life. Seeing it cleaned up and brought back to life is a joy. Who wouldn't want to support that?"

"I'm just fortunate now to have the time to appreciate all the canals across London. And if sharing my story inspires someone else to enjoy them, or to support and care for them as a Friend, that would mean the world to me."



"Canals join up all the things I care about; wildlife, engineering and people. We forget at our peril how interconnected they all are."

John Gilbert, a Friend, supporter and gentleman of Greenford

Transforming places, changing lives.
Find out more about our work

canalrivertrust.org.uk/where-we-work

Where there's a Will there's a way

As the UK's fastest declining mammal, the future of the water vole is still uncertain, but there are signs of hope across the country. A determined conservation movement is coming together to restore lost habitats and tackle the predatory mink behind their devastating decline.

Ansty, on the North Oxford Canal, is just one of many canal banks where we're playing our part, in this case, thanks to the kindness of those who've left us a gift in their Will.

At Ansty, we're using gifts in Wills from generous Friends and supporters like George Walker or Mo Moulton to protect the canals they loved. We're also improving the towpath for local people to enjoy and aiding the recovery of local wildlife.

This picturesque waterway, just north of Coventry and east of our popular Hawkesbury Junction, offers locals a peaceful escape into nature. Its 200-year-old soft clay banks also offer an ideal habitat for a small local population of water voles, who burrow into the banks to shelter, stay safe, and raise their young.

However, heavy rain frequently caused the low banks to flood, leaving the towpath too muddy for walkers and flooding a neighbouring golf course and farmers' fields. This created a dilemma for regional construction manager, Andy Morris and ecologist, Samantha Taylor –

how could they strengthen, raise and reinforce the banks without destroying crucial water vole habitat?

First, Andy's team raised the bank by about a foot and reinforced it with pre-made concrete bags, brought in by boat with help from our volunteers. New smooth sections of towpath were then laid to make the route more accessible for walkers.

Samantha's team then began covering the bagged bank with a thick layer of dredged silt for water voles to burrow into, topped with a wildflower turf full of native plants they love to eat.

"Water voles aren't picky and have been recorded eating over 220 species of plants, berries, and even crab apples," explains Samantha. "But they do favour plants found on the waterside, such as yellow iris and meadowsweet, and many of the native grasses and wildflowers in our rich turf. We laid the turf so it hangs over the water, making it easy for

water voles to climb out and tuck in. And of course, many of the wildflowers are good for pollinating bees and butterflies too.

Samantha points out that this site is just one of many she's working on to create more water vole habitats: "The Coventry, Ashford, and Oxford canals are important water vole strongholds, and work we've done to install floating coconut matting reedbeds against hard canal banks has been quite a success story. Evidence of droppings suggests water voles are expanding their range in the region. In the future, we hope this could be a good reintroduction site for the species."

Work like this to protect canals, wildlife, and improve the towpath for local people to enjoy is exactly the kind of project that Mo and George would have approved of. **It's also a powerful reminder of how gifts in Wills can safeguard our waterways for future generations, ensuring places like Ansty remain alive with nature and hope.**

"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 lasting gift to the waterways reflects many happy memories and a determination to help secure the future of our canals for their enjoyment by generations to come."

Mo's friends Rick and Jane



Mo with her beloved dogs



See how a gift in your Will could shape the future of canals
canalrivertrust.org.uk/giftsinwills

Designed for the future

Six years after severe rainfall placed Toddbrook Reservoir in real danger, the final chapter of its remarkable restoration is almost complete. Today, it stands as one of the most significant engineering achievements in our history.



Over the last couple of years Dilwyn Parry has led the work with the huge support of his team and partner organisations. “It’s good to see it through,” he reflects. “I like solving big problems and getting things done. This is by far the biggest engineering project in the Trust, and the largest job I’m ever likely to work on.”

After unprecedented rainfall in 2019 threatened to breach the reservoir’s dam wall, we invested millions of pounds in a new overflow spillway to remove excess water. Thanks to strict modern design standards, the reservoir is now strong enough to withstand a 1-in-10,000-year storm event, keeping the local community secure for centuries to come.

Toddbrook is just one of **22 large reservoir upgrades** we have committed to in recent years. That’s one reason why we depend on Friends and supporters like you so much. **Your gifts are vital to helping support these major works, protect local communities, and keep canals open and working in the meantime.**

With a reliable water supply soon online, Dilwyn is confident it will prevent a repeat of last summer’s drought issues on the Peak Forest Canal. And as a liveaboard boater himself, he’s proud this water will also help to supply the wider network: “Testing shows the water reaches 270 miles through the network –

down the Macclesfield Canal into the Trent & Mersey Canal, and as far as Birmingham and Newark-on-Trent.”

With the reservoir now almost operational, essential finishing touches are needed before the site is handed back to a very patient and understanding local community. Before the spring bird nesting season, we’re removing vegetation that’s sprung up since the water levels were lowered. Depending on rainfall in the coming months, water levels will gradually rise before fish restocking begins at the end of the year.

This spring and summer, Memorial Park below the dam will also be gradually landscaped with new shrubs, mature trees and spring bulbs. A new playground will be installed, a replacement sailing club will be built, and a pitch returned to the local football club. A popular walkway across the dam crest will also open again soon.

After such a big project, Dilwyn says he’ll be sad to leave a town where he’s almost become a local. “It’s a lovely place, and I get stopped every day with people asking, ‘What’s happening next, Dilwyn?’ But communication is really important - without people’s support, we could never give the town or our canals a safer future.”

“It’s the biggest engineering project in the Trust, and the largest job I’m ever likely to work on. I like the challenge of solving big problems and seeing things get done!”

Dilwyn Parry, project manager, Toddbrook Reservoir

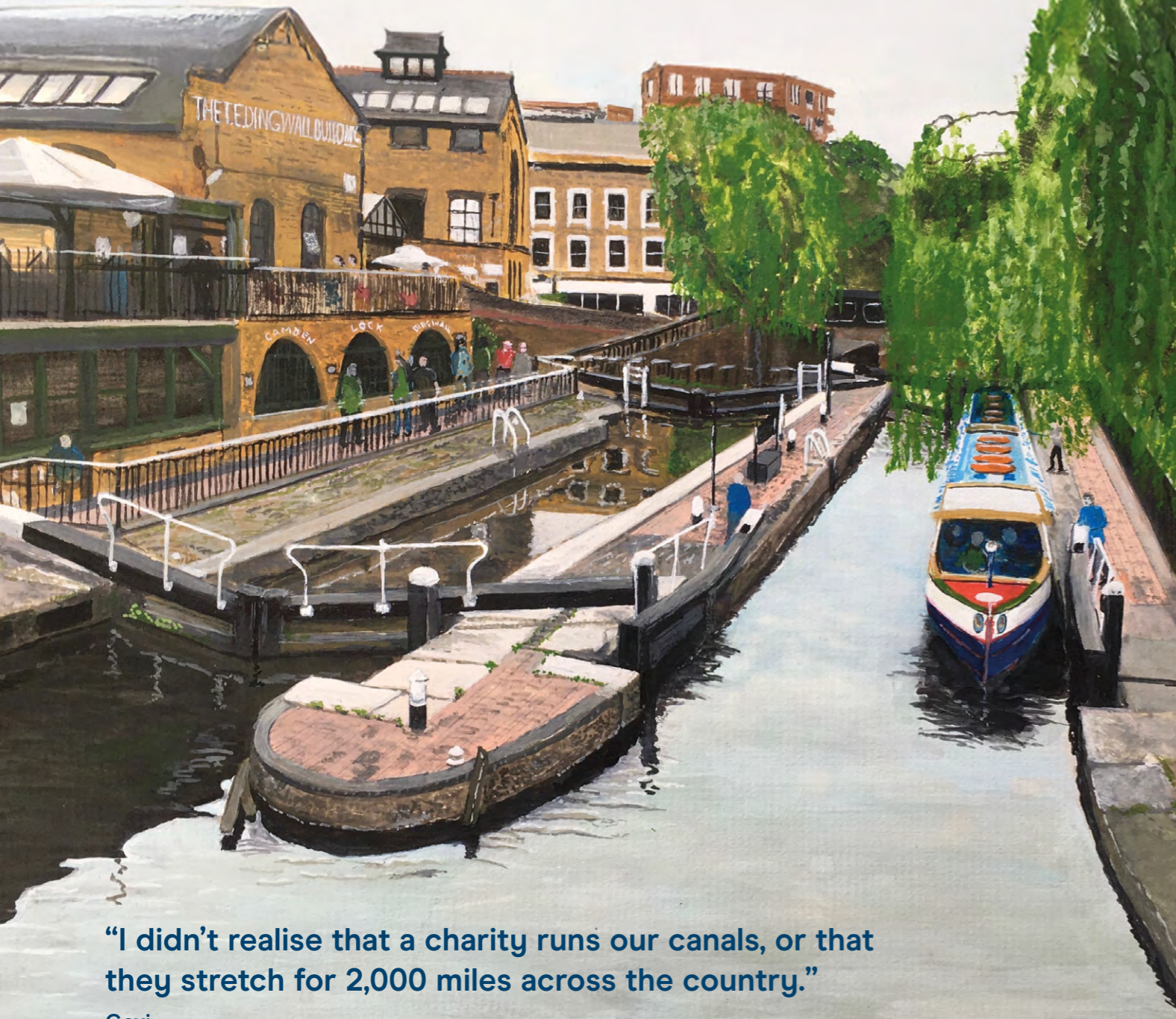
The impressive new spillway acts like the overflow in your bath at home, ensuring any excess water spills down to the River Goyt



Follow our progress
canalrivertrust.org.uk/toddbrook

Talking on the towpath

Every year, thanks to your support we protect canals for everyone to enjoy, and attract millions of visitors each year. And nowhere pulls in crowds from around the world like Camden Lock on the Regent's Canal.



“I didn’t realise that a charity runs our canals, or that they stretch for 2,000 miles across the country.”

Gexi

Camden Lock, painted by our talented local volunteer lock keeper Steve Francis. This scenic spot marries London’s industrial history with the very latest in street fashion, music and food



**Steve Francis,
lock keeper and artist**

Beyond his artistic talents, Steve helps boaters through three locks at Camden welcoming visitors from across the world to our canals. “People are amazed by locks and want to know how they work. My languages aren’t great, so there’s a lot of hand signals! People are fascinated to learn that it was built by hand, over 200 years ago, to trade goods across the country and worldwide.”



Lewis

In a throwback to how canals transported goods around London in the 19th century, we meet Lewis pulling a pallet of beer barrels along the towpath today. “I brew the beer at the local craft brewery and deliver it to local bars and restaurants along the towpath. It’s much easier than dropping them off by road. People love to stop at a watering hole for a drink, so the canal is crucial to the success of our business!”



Ash and Abishai

Abishai is visiting his brother Ash in London, and they love how our towpaths give them a calmer way to explore the capital. From London Zoo, they’ve been shopping in Camden Market and are now heading to King’s Cross. “I love how your charity helps to give us a quiet route through the city, says Ash. I often walk the canal here, and in other places I’ve lived in, like Leicester or Bristol.”



Gexi and Milo

Gexi lives and works nearby and takes Milo along her local canal every morning. “I love how peaceful the canal is, and it’s a safe way to reach the park for a run. We also like walking along the beautiful canal in Bath when we visit. I didn’t realise that a charity runs our canals, or that they stretch for 2,000 miles across the country. Maybe Milo and I should walk to Bath next time!”



Kate

We meet Kate taking one of her pupils for some quiet time by the water between lessons. “Thanks to the canal we give kids new experiences they would never otherwise have here in the middle of the city. Just up the road, there’s an activity centre where we take them kayaking or paddleboarding on the canal. In summer, we take them for a three-day break aboard a narrowboat on the River Lea.”



Amelie and Lilah

Even the rain doesn’t stop Amelie and Lilah from pushing their bike past the crowds of shoppers and tourists at Camden. “I prefer to use the canal to cycle to school,” says Amelie. “The shared space on your towpaths is a lot safer than going by road, and if you’re polite and use your bell, people are generally happy to make way for you. It’s simply the best way to get from A to B.”

Find out other ways you can help keep canals thriving for everyone to enjoy
canalrivertrust.org.uk/support-us



My work on the water

“It’s nice to be that link between the boaters who use the canal, the charity that cares for it and Friends like you who help to keep it all moving.”

Skilled members of our operations team, like Francesca, are vital to keeping canals navigable and towpaths accessible every day. It’s your support that makes it possible for them to care for our waterways to the standard that people depend on.

Francesca and her team of colleagues and volunteers are the eyes and ears of the South Oxford Canal. They are constantly monitoring water levels, and keeping locks, towpaths, and canal banks well-maintained and free of vegetation. As Francesca cruises the same stretch on her own narrowboat, she also sees things from a boater’s point of view. She tells us: “Part of the reason I became an operative is to help fix the things I know our customers care about the most.”

Managing canals through winter

“In my job, no two days are ever the same, and we’re always watching the weather. After a summer of drought, we’re now in a winter of floods. After a storm, our rural canal has a lot of field runoff, which can flow over lock gates, pull on mooring ropes, or push cruisers off course.

We take preventative action, opening sluices or lock paddles to keep our water levels as stable as possible. Then we deal with fallen trees or debris

blocking lock gates. In calmer weather, we also spend many days on our workboat. We just load up and tackle whatever we know needs fixing: potholes on the towpath, eroding banks, or cutting back overgrown vegetation.”

Although other colleagues handle major winter works, Francesca also helps to plan around them. “For example, I knew our local fuel boat, loaded with logs, coal, and diesel for boaters, would need to pass during a seven-week stoppage to repair two locks. So, I helped organise a gap in the works, so it could supply boaters in need.”

Even in her spare time, Francesca finds ways to support the network. “I volunteer on two restored heritage boats, and I love being at the tiller, helping to move them between festivals. It’s nice to be that link between the boaters who use the canal, the charity that cares for it and Friends like you who help to keep it all moving.”

Would you like to help protect your local canal?
Why not become a volunteer?

canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer