Issue 24 Autumn/Winter 2026

Canal & River Trust

Waterfront

The Canal & River Trust Magazine

Building climate-resilient canals

How your support strengthens critical. canal structures for the future.

Transferring water. Transforming canals.

Why climate change could give canals a 21st century purpose.

Making good the breach

Repairing the damage to reopen the Llangollen Canal.

Welcome.

Steady, dependable and immutable, we often think that our canals have always stayed the same. But the truth is that our waterways have simply adapted, evolved and lived on through changing times.

I live close to the Grand Union Canal, not far from Braunston, where my family have deep roots. My great-grandparents were working boaters. My grandmother and all her siblings were born aboard. Growing up, I was surrounded by stories of changing times on canals; the transition from horse-drawn boats to motorised craft, to the Great Canal Strike of 1923. So I know canals have never stood still.

And today they face a very modern challenge – our changing climate.

In this edition of Waterfront, we share how our charity is rising to the climate challenge. We look at how we respond to emergencies, repair the damage, invest in infrastructure and prepare for the future by using canals to alleviate drought or manage floods.

The boating stories I heard as a child brought to life the hard work, resilience and strong sense of community that characterised canal families. It's that same togetherness we need now to help canals adapt to a changing climate. Even our final story about the long history of Braunston Tunnel reminds me that with ingenuity, determination and commitment, canals will always overcome and endure.

In my job as head of fundraising operations at Canal & River Trust, I have the privilege of seeing and hearing just how much our waterways mean to generous Friends and supporters like you. And every day I see how we put your incredible support to work to protect them. So thank you for caring for our canals in these challenging times.

Whatever the weather may bring, your support today means future generations will still be able to tell their own stories of the waterways, just as my family did many years ago.

Thank you for caring for canals.
Jackie Taylor, Head of Fundraising Operations



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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.

Canal & River Trust is a charity registered with the Charity Commission no. 1146792. Registered address: Canal & River Trust, National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port, South Pier Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 4FW

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In this issue:



4–5 **Making good the breach**
Discover how we're repairing the damage to reopen the Llangollen Canal.



6–7 **First on the scene**
Hear how our operations leader was first on the scene at the Whitchurch breach.



8–9 **A gift that saved a lock**
Find out how a generous gift from a Will helped us repair the damage after disaster struck last year.



10–11 **15 years of postcode partnership.**
Celebrate the amazing difference players of the Postcode Lottery have made to our canals.



12–13 **Building climate-resilient canals for the future**
Learn how your support helps us strengthen critical canal structures for the future.



14–15 **Transferring water. Transforming canals.**
See how climate change could give canals a new purpose fit for the 21st century.



16–17 **Protecting our roots.**
Find out why laying hedgerows in winter helps wildlife thrive in summer.



18–19. **Canals for healthier living.**
Read our agenda-setting report on how canals can help improve the nation's health.



20–21. **Talking on the towpath.**
Join us at Foxton Locks and meet the volunteers and visitors enjoying the best of summer by water.



22–23. **Friendship from exploring canals.**
Discover why holidays on our canals inspired Jonathan and Paul to become Friends of our charity.



24 **Tunnelling back 230 years**
Come back in time as we light up the history of Braunston Tunnel.

Making good the breach

Last Christmas, the major breach on the Llangollen Canal left boaters stranded after a huge hole opened up in the embankment. The dramatic incident sent millions of litres of water cascading into neighbouring fields, creating one of the biggest repair challenges our teams have faced in recent years. Nine months on, with your generous support, work is well underway to restore this vital route.

For local boaters, businesses and neighbouring communities, the breach came as a huge shock. Overnight, a familiar stretch of canal became a major construction site. “It’s been an extremely busy nine months, juggling logistics, water pumps, fish rescues and looking after our neighbours before repairs can start”, says project manager Simon Harding. “There’s been a lot of spinning plates, but we’re getting there now.”

One of the most critical tasks was to keep water flowing around the breach. The Llangollen Canal supplies water to Hurlestone Reservoir near Chester, so from day one after the incident, pumps were installed to carry 42 million litres of water around the site. Your support has helped our local operations teams work day and night ever since to monitor water levels, keep the pumps running and keep vital supplies flowing to over 150,000 homes.



Our fish rescue team returned 1,000 fish, including pike, roach, perch, gudgeon, bream and ruffe, back to the canal.

Simon continues to explain that another key priority was dealing with 15 million litres of water that had escaped into a field and rescuing the fish within it: “It was five metres deep in places so we drained it to knee height so a specialist fish rescue team could get to work.”

Once drained of fish and water, the field revealed more devastation. The immense weight of the water had compacted the ground beyond recognition. The 13,000 tonnes of sandy soil from the embankment couldn’t be used to rebuild it safely. But it was the perfect way to reinstate the land for the farmer and clear a path for huge 30-tonne excavators to get on site and prepare the ground for repairs to begin.

Summer marked a milestone, as rebuilding of the embankment finally began, but it wasn’t simply a case of replacing the lost soil. Your gifts are helping us build a stronger structure to withstand more extreme weather, which will last many more decades to come.

“To rebuild the embankment, essentially, we’re making a ‘lasagne’. Layering up soil and rock between what we call geogrids. These meshes reinforce the structure, so the soil is less likely to move. Thankfully, we’ve been making hay while the sun shines and we’ll be ‘out of the ground’ before the winter rains. But we will still need to cast a concrete channel for the canal in the cold winter months. It will be a challenge, but it’s a safe, robust way to rebuild the canal, giving it 120 years of life or more.”

Now Simon is planning ahead to when we can refill the canal, turn off the water pumps, rebuild towpaths and seed wildlife-friendly vegetation, which will further bind the embankment together. We hope to reopen the canal in Spring 2027. But for now, he’s simply grateful for the support of Friends and supporters like you and many others who are helping us undertake this huge repair project as quickly as possible.

As you can read on the next page, the breach on the Llangollen Canal began as one of the most challenging incidents we’ve faced. Thankfully, it is now becoming a story of recovery, resilience and rebuilding for the future.

“Everyone’s been so supportive. It’s important that we do a good job and leave a legacy behind us.”

Simon Harding, Project Manager



Help protect canals today.
canalrivertrust.org.uk/support-us

Scan to donate

Restoring the field beside the breach was a vital first step. Without it, heavy excavators couldn’t get on site to rebuild the embankment.



Hayley with her operations team (from left) Les, Jonny, Roger, Sam, Roger, Daniel, Neil, Phil, John, Martin. Not pictured, but very much part of the team, Gavin, Ben and Mark

First into the breach

When an emergency hits our canals, operatives like Hayley Garrod and her fiancée, Dan Mullock, are often first on the scene. Last Christmas, they dealt with one of the most challenging incidents they've ever faced at Whitchurch on the Llangollen Canal.

"Dan and I have been together for nine years, since I joined the Ellesmere Yard operations team," Hayley explains. "This was supposed to be our first Christmas Day off together in all that time. **Instead, in the early hours of 22 December, I was woken by a water level alert on my phone. Right away I thought, 'That's not normal. We need to go.'"**

A harrowing scene

Within minutes, Hayley and Dan were in the van. As they approached Whitchurch, the night sky flashed blue with emergency vehicle lights. "We just thought 'This is serious, what will we find?'"

A massive canal embankment had collapsed, leaving two narrowboats stranded at the bottom of the canal bed, while a third boat teetered on the edge. **"We spent the first half-hour working alongside the fire service to ensure everyone was safe and accounted for.** We even found one chap walking barefoot, so we handed out dry clothes and wellies from our van."



"Neither of us has ever seen anything like it. The scene was eerie and harrowing – the rush of water, the silence of the night, and the confusion of people at the scene."

Hayley Garrod, Operations Team Leader



Holding back 73 million litres of water

With everyone at the scene safe, Hayley's wider team rushed to dam the canal. Experienced operative Roger Howard and his son, Jonny, arrived with a chainsaw and emergency stop planks, cutting them to fit the grooves of a nearby swing bridge. **"But with 73 million litres a day of water coming through this canal, it was some force, and really hard to get a tight seal in the pitch black, when you've no idea of what lies beneath."**

The temporary dam stabilised the breach scene and the canal upstream. Downstream, however, stranded boats were already listing badly. Within hours, the team installed pumps to refill the dry channel. Working through Christmas alongside River Canal Rescue, the team helped refloat grounded boats and tow them safely away.

"Looking after boaters is what we do. But this was really serious," continues Hayley. "We were really concerned that some people had lost their homes. You can't imagine their turmoil, especially at this time of year. We spent a lot of time with people, reassuring them that we were here to help. In return, everyone was so supportive, plying us with cups of tea. Christmas dinner ended up being sandwiches in the car park, but we were all in the same boat."

Trauma, teamwork and quiet determination

Looking back, the experience remains traumatic, but Hayley is immensely proud of her team's resilience: "It shows things can go wrong, but we have an extremely capable team. It was a baptism of fire for some, but they took it in their stride."

Even now, while repairs continue, the team operates pumps 24 hours a day to keep water flowing around the breach. "But we still have to handle the day job – clearing weirs, fixing leaks, mending paddles, and responding to fallen trees or potholes. The canal might seem serene, but the behind-the-scenes effort is enormous. **I'm proud that my team is full of conscientious people who always go the extra mile because they genuinely care and are so grateful to everyone who supports our charity. It's thanks to their support that we can put boots on the ground every day."**

Long after the TV cameras have moved on, your gifts are helping to keep water moving, protect people and make the canal stronger and better able to withstand future challenges this winter.

Help protect canals today.
Donate now canalrivertrust.org.uk/storms

A gift that saved a lock.

We work every day of the year to protect canals and make them more resilient for people, nature and the future. But sometimes an emergency comes out of the blue. And that's where your support is vital. You help us respond and repair the damage whenever major incidents arise.

Last year, moments after a cruiser entered Kelston Lock on the River Avon, its outboard motor suddenly exploded. Flames quickly spread across the boat and set the lock gates alight, forcing the crew to scramble to safety.

In the chaos, they somehow managed to rescue their dog and escape, unharmed but understandably shaken.

Sadly, the fire left a lasting mark on the lock itself. The huge oak lock gates were burnt beyond repair. Yet, thanks to a generous gift left by a long-standing supporter in their Will, our teams were able to get on site within hours to begin planning the complex repairs needed to restore this vital route.

Ian Grice, the regional construction manager responsible for the repairs, explains the huge difference the gift made: "Repairing the lock was far from straightforward. Before work could even begin, we had to wait for high winter river levels to recede. Specialist divers were then called in to dam and drain the lock with stop planks, creating a dry environment so we could get down into the chamber and assess the full extent of the damage.

"As the huge lock gates were so badly damaged in the fire, we had to completely replace them at a cost of around £240,000. The four panels, called leaves, that make up the gates weighed a massive 3.5 tonnes each. They were built by our specialist team at our Stanley Ferry Workshop near Wakefield – the only facility we have that's large enough to deliver lock gates of this scale.

"Among the heaviest gates fitted by our teams this year, it was a huge logistical challenge to transport them. We had to truck the gates down the motorway and then float them on a crane barge into the hard-to-access rural lock. Once the gates were safely fitted, our local volunteer team helped carry out over 400 square metres of pointing and masonry repairs to the lock walls. Whenever we're taking on works of this scale, we try to upgrade the whole lock at once. Within weeks, the huge lock was open and working again in time for a busy summer ahead and making sure boaters could travel in and out of Bristol along the River Avon."

The incident at Kelston shows that we can never predict where or when an emergency will strike. But your support, including gifts in Wills, helps ensure we're ready for the unexpected, and able to act quickly to protect the canals, locks and waterways people rely on every day.

Read our very latest Gifts in Wills Impact Report, and you'll discover how gifts in Wills help maintain the network, protect canal heritage, let nature thrive and share the joy of time by water with millions of people. You'll be amazed at how far and wide your gift could go.

"We face an everyday battle to manage ageing canals that need constant care to keep them working for future generations and we are so grateful for this generous gift that has helped us complete these vital repairs."

Emily Ding,
Gifts in Wills Manager



The fire-damaged gates were removed for disposal

New lock gates weighing 3.5 tonnes each were installed

Specialist divers were brought in to dam and drain the lock

Discover the lasting impact of a gift in your Will
canalrivertrust.org.uk/giftsinwills

Celebrating 15 years of postcode support

Often a journey isn't just about where you're going, but who you have beside you. This year marks 15 years of support from Postcode Lottery players, who have raised more than £26m since 2012 to help keep canals alive.

Just as your generosity as a Friend or supporter makes a difference in so many ways, Postcode Lottery players are helping canals thrive. Here we celebrate just 15 of the many projects – both past and present – they have supported to strengthen canals, protect heritage, help wildlife recover and build resilience across our network, ensuring canals remain thriving for everyone to enjoy. If you play the Postcode Lottery, it's another way you're making amazing things happen.

Protecting canals | Preserving heritage | Restoring wildlife | People and community

1



Replacing Lock Gates
This winter, thanks to Postcode Lottery players, we will install '15 Locks for 15 years' to mark this special anniversary. Locks from Camden to Fradley Junction and from Stoke Bruerne to Audlem will be upgraded with a total of 43 gates replaced. Your Friendship and support will also help replace many more. As gates need changing every 25 years, everyone's support is vital to keep our canals working.

2



Restoring Brent Reservoir
Locks only flow with enough water to feed them. Players' support has helped us to drain, clean up and upgrade Brent Reservoir, improving a much-loved green space in the heart of London.

3



Upgrading Tees Barrage
We were able to undertake major maintenance works at the iconic Tees Barrage to help build the area's resilience, prevent flooding, improve water quality and bolster river wildlife.

4

Making over Marple
This iconic lock flight on the Peak Forest Canal enjoyed much-needed restoration in 2018. Postcode Lottery players helped us shore up 200-year-old lock walls and made the aqueduct a safer place to admire spectacular views behind new safety railings.

5

Balancing Anderton Boat Lift
What goes up, must come down, and at Anderton Boat Lift the rise of one hydraulic boat lift is driven by the fall of another. In 2019, vital maintenance works made possible by funding from Postcode Lottery players and your support helped keep the lift on an even keel.

6

Digitising our heritage
Now future generations from across the world can explore and learn from the collection at The National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port; the largest inland waterways collection in the world.

7



Reviving Interchange Basin Towpath Bridge
Thanks to Postcode Lottery players and the Postcode Earth Trust, this historic bridge was refurbished in 2023. Over one million people cross it each year to reach Camden Lock.

8



Crafting apprentices
Postcode Lottery players' support is enabling our world-leading stonemasons, lock gate joiners and engineers to train up the next generation of canal craftspeople, keeping these unique skills alive.

9



Growing the world's longest orchard
We're growing thousands of native fruit trees along 50 miles of canal between Worcester and Wolverhampton, providing a route for wildlife back into the city.

10



Reviving towpath hedgerows
Players' support enabled us to share traditional hedge-laying skills with hundreds of volunteers. With over 1,400km of native hedgerows along canals, we are uniquely placed to protect traditions that help wildlife thrive.
See more on pages 16–17.

11

Putting down roots in canal communities
Thanks to Postcode Lottery players, our Community Roots programme helps encourage thousands of people to get involved with their local canal, inspiring them to help protect their stretch for future generations to enjoy.

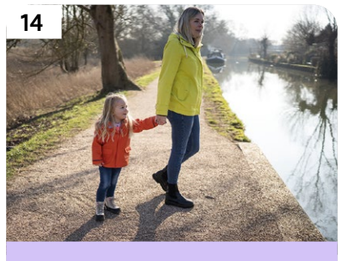
12

Getting young people fishing again
Postcode Lottery players' support for our amazing Let's Fish! programme has helped revive a dying sport and turn thousands of young people into enthusiastic anglers, helping them discover new skills, confidence and wellbeing through fishing.

13

Helping young people discover canals
By supporting our Explorers learning programmes for schools and youth groups, players' support has helped over a million young people use canals as living classrooms. Inspiring future engineers, ecologists and environmental champions.

14



Keeping toddlers safe
Together, we've been helping toddlers to learn water safety in song, stories and theatre shows. 'Quack, Quack, Two Steps Back' delivers an important safety message that young ones love.

15



Picking litter from our towpaths
Our next big mission is to encourage even more litter pickers to add their picks to our interactive map, so we can see the difference we're all making together. This would identify where future efforts are needed and help others find new places to pick.

Why not join our litter picking team today?

Add your litter pick to the map: canalrivertrust.org.uk/litterpick

Building climate-resilient canals for the future.

After one of the driest summers on record, canals need your help again as we prepare for the coming winter. So how can we adapt our canals to climate change, over 250 years after they were first built?



Low water levels on the Rochdale Canal during this summer's droughts highlight the challenges posed by climate change

Keeping our canals strong, resilient and flexible enough to cope with extreme weather is one of the biggest challenges we face. This summer, our teams have worked around the clock to keep canals full and boats moving as a result of droughts across England and Wales. Yet as winter approaches, storms are likely to cause flash floods on dry ground, threatening our embankments, locks, bridges and aqueducts. Fallen trees can block towpaths, and debris often builds up on sluices, weirs and culverts.

Your support is vital to help canals withstand climate change

In the face of increasingly extreme weather, it's crucial that we closely monitor our canal assets all year, identifying structures at higher risk and taking proactive action to maintain and strengthen them. Every day, principal engineers like Sara Barsley and her colleagues are looking for signs that our changing climate could put canals at risk.

As Sara says: "Every structure tells a story. Our job is to spot potential problems early and strengthen vulnerable structures before issues become emergencies. It's an enormous task, as we care for over 10,000 principal assets like canal banks, towpaths, bridges and locks."

Of these, Sara has responsibility for around 130 'Critical Assets'

Checked every month, they present the biggest risk or highest repair cost if they were to ever fail. This includes reservoirs, embankments and structures located close to homes, roads and railways, where any failure could have severe consequences.

Sara and her colleagues use technology to give early warning of potential issues with these structures. This includes sensors monitoring water levels and ground-penetrating radar detecting movement within embankments. New techniques are also being trialled, including building 3D computer models of bridges or tunnels to assess if any issues are worsening over time.

Her colleague and acting head of asset management, David Crane, outlines how maintenance to improve climate resilience is prioritised according to these ongoing assessments of canal infrastructure: "It's why we've been upgrading our steepest embankments close to towns where people live – such as at Llanfoist on the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal. And it's also why we've made huge investments in our 74 large reservoirs in recent years."



In contrast to drought, as we experience more extremes of weather, winter storms can cause canals to flood

"We know to expect more droughts and floods in future."

"So managing water levels in reservoirs and canals is a key priority," David says. "It's our job to flag concerns, and we have expert teams and inspection processes in place. Your support helps us plan work to build more resilience across the network but also be there to respond to any emergencies. However, there's always so much more we'd like to do to upgrade the network."

But helping canals adapt to climate change isn't just about maintaining existing infrastructure.

Sara and David are also exploring the important role they could play in the UK's future water and energy systems. "Water companies are keen to use our canals to transfer supplies around the country. Energy suppliers need our water to cool low-carbon power stations," says David. "In return, they could help fund the investment needed to create stronger, future-proofed canals. It's one way to upgrade our canals and give them a new purpose into the future; helping tackle the impact of extreme weather as a result of climate change."

With your support today, we're ready to rise to the challenge of extreme weather this winter. And together, we're helping our historic waterways continue adapting, evolving and serving communities for generations to come, whatever challenges the future brings.



"Despite all the technology we use, you can't beat going out and looking in person.

We massively rely on local teams to walk their canal, look for change and spot any concerns."

Sara Barsley,
Principal Engineer, Asset Management

As the climate changes, regular inspections of critical assets like Pontcysyllte Aqueduct by our asset management team are more vital than ever

Help canals rise to the climate challenge
canalrivertrust.org.uk/storms

Transferring water. Transforming canals.

After one of the driest and most challenging summers ever, the need to secure reliable water supplies has never been clearer. But in future, one of our busiest canals could move water from the Midlands to the South East, demonstrating how canals can help tackle one of the nation's biggest environmental challenges as our climate changes.

The transformational Grand Union Canal Transfer scheme is an innovative partnership between Canal & River Trust, Severn Trent and Affinity Water. "As like all the best partnerships, it's a win-win," says Peter Walker, our head of strategic infrastructure projects. "We plan to use surplus recycled water from the Midlands to help secure domestic water supplies for millions of people in the South-East who bear the brunt of droughts."

An exciting prospect for the future of canals

"Our canals offer a ready-made network to move water around the country and secure stable supplies. But ageing canals also urgently need more protection, as they are affected by climate change too. Critically, the water companies will invest to upgrade the Grand Union, Oxford and Coventry canals."

Peter's view is reinforced by Clare Carlaw, Head of Engagement, Land & Consents, at Affinity Water, who told us: "This is an amazing scheme that will deliver water to where it's needed most, while securing the long-term resilience of the canals too. Our investment will help the charity care for the canals for decades to come."

Restoring towpaths, banks, locks, and historic canal buildings

Subject to final government approval and planning consents, Peter says work is scheduled to begin in 2030 and be completed just three years later. Though the scheme will move a vast amount of water in high summer, Peter is confident it will not detract from the overall boating experience. "Water has been transferred at similar speeds on the Llangollen Canal to Hurlestone Reservoir, near Chester since the 1950s, without affecting enjoyment of one of our most popular waterways."

New shallow locks, raised banks and improved towpaths will mean stronger canals, reliable water supplies and a network better equipped to cope with climate change. Wildlife will benefit from environmental enhancements along the route, while design principles developed by the Trust will protect the canal's character.



We plan to restore the dry dock beside Stoke Bruerne's famous lock

Peter continues: "We hope to bring the dry dock at Stoke Bruerne back to life as a bypass for the first time since the 1850s. There's also a wonderful listed brick-built pump house at Hawkesbury Junction that we plan to restore to preserve it for future generations."



This listed pumping station at Hawkesbury Junction will be given a new lease of life

Ground-breaking projects like these could give canals a vital new purpose for the 21st century. As Peter notes, "As proof of concept for other water transfer schemes, it could prove transformational, freeing up funds to deliver ripple effects across the network."

It's certainly exciting to think that in helping our nation adapt to a changing climate, canals could find a renewed purpose, that helps them thrive too in centuries ahead.

Could canals help solve the water crisis?
canalrivertrust.org.uk/water-transfers

Grand Union Canal Transfer route overview

Our canals will transfer water from Atherstone on the Coventry Canal to Great Brickhill on the Grand Union Canal



Benefits of the scheme.

- Strengthen the UK's water infrastructure and create a legacy of resilient water resources
- Invest in the resilience of the canal network for the benefit of communities, today and for future generations
- Sustain and protect existing historic features and settings along the canal
- Help secure the future of the historic Coventry, Oxford and Grand Union canals

> "The scheme is a key part of our chief executive, Campbell Robb's, vision for the future – using canals as solutions for 21st-century problems.
>
> It shows we can innovate and use partnerships as a key driver of investment."
>
> Peter Walker
> Head of Strategic Infrastructure Projects

Grand Union Canal Transfer in numbers

Moving up to
115m litres
of water daily.

That's 46
Olympic
swimming pools.

Moving at
0.6mph...

Over
70 miles
of upgraded canal

Protecting our roots

250 years after they were first planted, hedgerows continue to help wildlife thrive along our towpaths. The UK has lost around 50% of hedgerows since WW2, but thanks to a growing army of volunteers, we're now using traditional hedge-laying skills to preserve these vital habitats for nature for generations to come.

"When our canals were built through the countryside 250 years ago," explains Catherine West, Volunteer Co-ordinator and hedgerow enthusiast, "it made sense to line them with hawthorn and blackthorn, naturally spikey species. Hedges delineated land ownership, kept valuable livestock away from the water and stopped those on the canal rambling across neighbouring land! Back then, hedge-laying was a common skill which in turn provided wood for tools, firewood for the hearth and fruit for the table."

Hedgerows remain an essential, but often overlooked, part of our canal landscape today. Especially because so much of this extremely rich habitat has been lost elsewhere from our countryside.

Every winter, as our engineers and craftspeople carry out essential work on our infrastructure, it's also the time we maintain these vital habitats for wildlife. With your support, our vegetation management teams cut back the equivalent length of nine Hadrian's Walls of hedgerows every year, to stop them growing out across the towpath.

Every 25–30 years, however, the heaviest, most overhanging and overgrown hedges need a serious haircut, on top of the yearly trim. With our vegetation team already having so much to do, Catherine saw an amazing opportunity to arm our volunteers with hedge-laying skills.

She says: "Hedge-laying can appear brutal, but by cutting long straggly stems down near the roots, and laying them low along the hedgeline, we regenerate the original tree. The cut stems grow new branches that intertwine and become stronger and healthier, prolonging their lifespan long into the future."

This careful work, done when nature is hiding away for winter, feeds, shelters and sustains a wonderfully wide variety of wildlife throughout the seasons to come. Over 30 bird species, including robins, blackbirds and thrushes, nest in our hedges in spring, feasting on caterpillars, beetles and bugs to feed their young. Insects like bees, wasps and butterflies rely on pollen from flowers while bats, toads, dormice and hedgehogs forage in these corridors before hibernating in autumn.

Catherine's hedge-laying group is growing organically too. What started as a small group of volunteers has gradually grown into a thriving team, sharing hedge-laying skills even more widely. "Our East Midlands volunteer teams have really embraced hedge-laying, once the busy canal season slows in autumn. They've turned an unused part of our land into a community garden where we can grow new trees to support hedge-laying all around the area. Because people generally volunteer on a canal close to home, they take enormous pride and ownership of their hedges. They return year after year to care for them and that encourages others to join them and learn too."

Catherine hopes her roots-up approach to volunteer hedge-laying will continue to grow and spread right across our network in years to come. It will help support the vegetation team and help wildlife bloom across all 1,400 kilometres of our hedgerows. It's an age-old skill anyone can learn, wherever you live.

Sign up as a conservation volunteer this winter or donate to help to protect canals and you too can keep a unique skill alive and help protect hedgerow wildlife for generations to come.

Keep our hedgerows thriving
canalrivertrust.org.uk/support-us



Relaying hedges every 25–30 years helps them grow back stronger and healthier



Bank voles love to feast on the fruits our hedgerows provide to see them through the winter



"It's not the training that makes you a hedge-layer, but the practice.

It's slow, meditative, and gives you a wonderful sense of purpose.

Our hedges are part of our heritage, and only through managing them will they survive into the future."

Catherine West,
Volunteer Co-ordinator

Healthier lives by water

We've long believed life is better by water. Now a new Canal & River Trust report sets out the evidence. Co-author Katrina Hull says it shows that improving canals is helping to create healthier people and stronger communities. Crucially, it's a message she believes many are ready to hear.

Of the many facts in the report, one underlines the scale of the health crisis facing the nation: **People who live in the most deprived neighbourhoods of England can expect to live 19 years less than people who live in richer areas**. "The key point is that our canals run right through the communities that feel inequality the hardest," says Katrina. "That means canals are uniquely positioned to help turn their health around."

The Walking with Doctors programme, which we initiated in the West Midlands several years ago, is the perfect example of what Katrina believes canals can offer. It gives people the chance to get some exercise on our towpaths and ask healthcare professionals questions about anything from diabetes, to heart disease or mental health problems at the same time.

"The NHS can't keep picking up the pieces," Katrina says. "We need to create health, rather than treating illness. Health is shaped by how we live, work, and spend our free time. Canals can be part of that change."

"I had to stop doing the lock keeping because I had angina. I ended up having triple bypass heart surgery earlier this year, but thanks to Walking with Doctors I was soon walking three miles a day again."

Bryan Philpot, a former volunteer lock keeper for our charity.

Improving canals, improves health

The report explores how millions of people now spend time on safe, inviting canals that are open to all. With your support, we are working hard to create more clean, green corridors that support nature, which in turn helps create good health for those who need it most. It also looks at how careful design and redevelopment of canals in places like King's Cross in London and Gas Street Basin in Birmingham can bring people together, help them get active and enjoy life by water.



758 miles

of canals fly a Green Flag, in recognition of the quality of our outdoor spaces

Discover the health benefits of canals:

Creating a healthy lifestyle

All the evidence shows canals do help improve physical and mental health. Whether people boat, walk, run, pedal, or explore nature and history on canals, any activity adds up. Simply walking your dog by calm waters does you the world of good. That's why health and social care teams now prescribe time by water. Along with our 'Let's' programme and Sports England partnerships, we're getting millions of people moving on canals every year. In fact, studies already show this activity saves the NHS huge sums of money. Investing in canals could push that figure even higher.



£1.1 billion

of NHS cost savings are generated by activity on canals every year

Building strong communities

Many of us enjoy time by water with friends and family, or when we're seeking calm after a busy day, but not everyone knows their canal is on their doorstep. That's why our engagement programmes reach out to those most in need of time by water. We help people live healthier lives and bring communities together, which often leads to people volunteering on their local stretch too. Many volunteers say working outdoors and meeting new people helps them feel healthier in body and mind. Strong canal communities are good for health, belonging, and for protecting our waterways for the future.



22,390 people

participate in our Community Roots programmes, in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods of England and Wales

Ready for climate change

The report outlines how well-maintained canals can help people adapt to a warming climate. Canals also supply vital drinking water to millions of people in cities like Bath or Chester. In times of drought this supply is more important than ever. In towns and cities where summer heat rises highest, canals help to provide an oasis along the towpath, so people can keep cool. Thanks to your help many people now walk or cycle along urban canals helping to cut pollution, reduce car use, and improve air quality.



5 million people

are supplied drinking water by our canals and rivers

Visit canalrivertrust.org.uk/healthier-lives-report

Talking on the towpath

Millions of people flocked to our canals this summer, enjoying holidays afloat, days out with family and peaceful towpath walks. On a visit to Foxton Locks, with its famous ‘staircase’, waterside café and beautiful countryside setting, it’s easy to see why it remains a favourite destination. We stopped to chat with visitors and volunteers to discover why canals still attract people from all walks of life.



Having volunteered for thirteen years, David speaks from experience: “The role is about running water, keeping people safe, and talking to visitors. The water zigzags in and out of locks via the side ponds, so we open the special red or white coloured paddles on each lock strictly in order so they don’t flood. We say, ‘Red before White and you’ll be alright.’ I constantly keep an eye out and make people feel safe and welcome. I love telling people about the amazing engineering and history of Foxton.”

“Our Friends and supporters help keep unique places like Foxton alive. It’s such a special and unique canal destination.”



Krishna, Arvi, Milli, Nilam, Ava and Arun

The Mistry family had moored up for a bite to eat, after hiring a day boat to give the kids an exciting new experience they’d never tried before. “We went through a tunnel, and it was really spooky!” says Ava. “I’m a bit scared to go down the locks in the boat, but I would like to wind up the paddles and push open the gates.” Her mum Kavi loves Foxton, saying: “Thanks for giving us such a brilliant place to bring the kids and enjoy the holidays.”



Alistair

Former landlord, Alistair invited us aboard ‘Treacle’ as he headed up the locks toward Stoke Bruerne. “I’m one of the instructors at the nearby Narrowboat Skills Centre in Debdale, so I’m a regular through here.

The lock keeping team are brilliant, doing a difficult job with extreme changes in the weather between wet and dry.

Given the summer we’ve had, I think every boater needs to help conserve water where they can, whether that’s sharing locks, reporting leaks or being mindful of water use when travelling.”



Amelia, Katie, Elijah and Ruari

Mums Amelia and Katie had their hands full as they pushed prams and guided toddlers up the steep towpath. But an ice cream at the top lock made the effort worth it. “I’ve been coming here since I was young,” says Amelia, “so it’s a great place to come back to for a picnic in the holidays.” “I’m a school teacher”, says Katie, “but I didn’t know about your ‘Quack, Quack, Two Steps Back’ water safety story. That sounds like the right way to speak to children.”

From history to wildlife, boating to volunteering, and spending time with loved ones, conversations like these remind us why canals continue to mean so much to so many people.



In contrast to Dave, Lindsey is quite new to lock keeping: “I’ve just sold my business, so with more time I thought this was perfect for me. I thought it was just about opening gates, but I’ve found the water management part of the job fascinating. It’s lovely just to be outside and get in tune with all the nature around you.”

“I love the fact that these locks have been here for 200 years. We need to make sure they are here for hundreds of years after I’m gone.”



Paul (left) and Jonathan were inspired to become Friends after years of enjoying canal holidays





Paul and his dog, Marple, had a great time exploring Monk's Lode at Wicken Fen

Friendship from exploring canals

Having built their partnership on discovering our canals together, Paul and Jonathan, from Salford, are proud to be longstanding Friends of our charity. Here, they share what being a Friend means to them.





One of Jonathan and his dog Diggle's favourite cruises took them through Cambridge

"For us, it's always been important to give something back to causes we care about," says Jonathan. "After years of enjoying canal holidays, we became Friends to keep them alive. We're the kind of people who want to be active so making a monthly gift felt like the natural way to help protect the canals we love."

It was only when Jonathan met Paul that he became a boater, though he'd long enjoyed exploring Manchester's towpaths. "We've done eight or nine hire holidays now," says Jonathan. "From the very first trip, I was hooked. At four miles an hour, your whole mindset changes. It's so good for relaxation and mental health."

For Paul, a passion for canals goes back even further. "It all started back in that long, hot summer of 1976," says Paul. "Dad took us on a canal trip from Little Venice down to Camden Town. When we floated past London Zoo, it blew my mind."

"As I got older, I booked a canal holiday to explore Birmingham's historic canals; I just loved it!"

"You understand that there's a living, working 250-year-old museum all around you that needs support to stay alive."

Paul

"To this day, canal history is my thing," continues Paul. "I'm slightly obsessed with canals that have been restored like the Caldon Canal. Back in the 80s, I cycled the whole of the Kennet & Avon Canal when it was derelict. So now it's fabulous to see it brought back to life. Around every corner there's a lock, bridge or story that connects you to the people who built and worked these waterways generations ago."

"Being a Friend brings you closer to canals, and opens up a whole new world," agrees Jonathan. "We receive regular updates, stories and insights that connect us to canals even when we're at home. It's really made us feel part of something. You also get a really deep understanding of the challenges the Canal & River Trust faces, especially as funding is being cut and canals are bearing the brunt of more extreme weather. Becoming a Friend has made us feel much better informed."

"On our travels we notice more of the amazing work the charity does, despite ageing infrastructure and the impact of climate change. It's worrying to see damage done by breaches, droughts or floods. But heartening to see how much they put into repairing and maintaining the system."

"It reminds you of the value of being a Friend. You trust your donations are being spent where they are needed most. Wherever we go on canals, it feels good to be playing your own small part in protecting what you see around you. That's one of the reasons we want to continue and deepen our support. Now we've decided to leave a legacy to help canals carry on, so the next generation can enjoy exploring this wonderful network, as much as we have."

"As Friends, we feel part of something and much better informed."

Jonathan

Do you know someone who would like to become a Friend?

Why not introduce someone you know to the waterways you love? Sharing your passion for canals is one of the best ways to help ensure they have a future for generations to come. Every penny of the £3m Friends give each year, goes directly towards helping keep canals open and alive.

Visit: canalrivertrust.org.uk/friends

Tunnelling back 230 years



'Leggers' preparing to enter a tunnel to help guide the boat through the darkness

The sound of horses' hooves fades as the boat steers into the mouth of the tunnel. Inside, two men lie on their backs, pushing against the damp brick walls with their feet, inching the boat through the gloom.

For generations, this was a familiar sight at Braunston Tunnel, Northamptonshire, one of the earliest canal tunnels ever built. It opened in 1796, before tunnels had towpaths so boats were 'legged' through the darkness while horses were led over the hillside.

As we celebrate the 230th anniversary year of Braunston Tunnel, we're inviting visitors to discover one of the most exciting places in canal history and experience first-hand the engineering that helped shape the waterways we know today. Hewn from the landscape using hand-held tools, the tunnel remains an extraordinary feat of engineering. During excavation, unstable ground created a slight misalignment, leaving a gentle S-bend that boaters still carefully navigate over two centuries later.

The tunnel helped transform Braunston into a thriving hub of canal trade, becoming known as the 'Heart of the Waterways'. Today, this much-loved spot still welcomes boaters, walkers and cyclists from across the country.

Braunston Tunnel has only survived for over two centuries thanks to generations of care and maintenance. Today, it's Friends like you who help our teams protect and preserve its remarkable living history from the challenges of ageing and extreme weather. The magazine began with Jackie's memories of growing up hearing stories of Braunston and the people who lived and worked on the waterways. Thanks to your support, those stories can continue for generations to come.

Supplied by National Waterways Archive, Canal & River Trust

Donate today to keep our canal heritage alive
canalrivertrust.org.uk/support-us



A working boat family with their boat and horse, Braunston Tunnel, August 1924

Canal & River Trust, National Waterways Museum Ellesmere Port, South Pier Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 4FW. UK registered charity: 1146792

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