



**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water

Issue 19 Spring/Summer 2024

Waterfront

The Canal & River Trust Magazine

In the eye of the storm

See how we respond in the event of an emergency

Peaky Blinders comes home

Find out why writer Steven Knight is opening his new studio in Digbeth on the Dudley No.1 Canal

A momentous year

Celebrating the 250th Anniversary of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal

Welcome

As our first 2024 edition of Waterfront underlines, our canals are always alive with stories, opportunity, and activity. Even in the depths of winter, there's never a dull moment by water.

In recent months, we've been inviting you to join us behind the scenes by visiting our open days or virtual events. Today, you can do the same in Waterfront, as we explore how we prepare for the emergencies that can arise following the winter storms that are becoming more frequent as our climate warms.

Our construction teams are also busy around the country. As Bingley Three Rise is restored, explore the history of how the Leeds & Liverpool Canal was built. Waterfront also joins the local community at the Welsh Harp reservoir in London as we undertake work to revitalise this important haven for urban wildlife. And we mark our works at Stoke Bruerne by digging into the history of one of its most famous daughters, Sister Mary Ward.

There's plenty of building going on by the Digbeth No1 Canal in Birmingham, as Peaky Blinders writer Steven Knight brings a new TV and film studio to the canalside. You can find out about the renovations afoot on the Aire & Calder Navigation too as we replace 30-year-old nest boxes that have helped hundreds of barn owls to thrive.

Canals are for every generation and in this issue, we look at how they help build careers and opportunities for people of all ages and from all backgrounds. There's a place for you by water, if you're looking to get fit, find a change of career, volunteer on our canals, or simply enjoying some amazing waterside scenery along our towpaths.

Thank you for your Friendship, time, and support. It's only thanks to you that we can continue to work so hard through winter, so everyone can enjoy the history, nature, and activity on our waterways over the summer to come.

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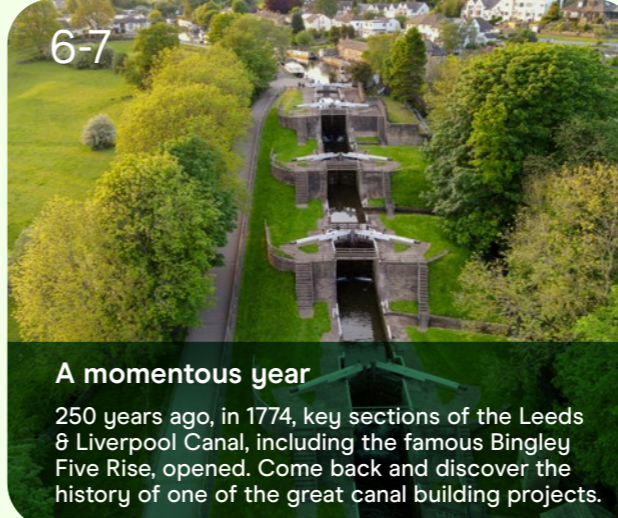
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A dramatic revival for Digbeth
Peaky Blinders writer, Steven Knight has exciting plans for the Digbeth No.1 Canal after opening a new film and TV studio right on the towpath. See the amazing opportunities he's creating by water.

Where's your Waterfront?




Many thanks for sending in selfies of you reading Waterfront magazine in your favourite places across the network. This month, it's Friend and keen angler, Mike, enjoying his Waterfront in between catches at Cambrian Wharf in Birmingham. Please do keep sharing and sending us your stories and images to friends@canalrivertrust.org.uk

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Once a high-flier in high finance, Spencer Goddard has now carved out a vital new fundraising role for our charity. Learn why it's never too late to change career on our canals.



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Discover what our Marsh Award winners have to say about their many and varied volunteering roles, from every corner of our 2,000 miles of waterways.





In the eye of the storm

When there's an emergency on our canals, we're ready to respond. Storms, floods, fires, structural failures or pollution incidents all put human life, wildlife and property at risk. But our team is always on standby to help when called.

As a rapidly changing climate increasingly impacts on our historic but fragile canals, responding to emergencies becomes more challenging every winter. Some of the building materials and methods used on the network are over 250 years old, making our waterways particularly susceptible to extreme weather. That's why we have an 85 people-strong emergency response team on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, covering all our waterways.

We're not a blue light responder like the police, fire or ambulance services; but our teams are positioned so that we're quickly on the scene in an emergency, whether a canal bursts its banks, a bridge is compromised, pollution threatens wildlife or a canal-side factory catches fire. This helps minimise damage to

our canals and rivers and in extreme events, we work with the other services help to protect life.

Over the winter, we saw a series of at least ten storms hit our shores. Storm Babet brought torrential rain, flooding and gale-force winds. Across our network, hundreds of trees were blown down, we've seen banks collapsed and towpaths were washed away.

"It's about protecting life and property," says our operational projects and standards manager, Peter Rodriguez. "That's our primary focus, reacting to a critical situation, containing the emergency and working to making it safe. Once the initial crisis has been averted, by sandbagging a leak, fencing off dangerous masonry or draining a section of canal, our engineers take over to look at repairs."



Key to our protocols are preparing for storms to come. By keeping a close eye on weather and water levels, teams on the ground operate floodgates to divert dangerous waters away. Our press and social media teams also alert boaters and towpath users to dangers ahead. In fact, emergencies are part of everyone's job at our charity. Round the clock, passionate teams across the country are on standby to help. Our canal customers play a vital role too, we thank them for being our eyes and ears on the towpath and alerting us to danger.

Sadly, the cost of these emergencies and repairs can run into millions of pounds. Each winter, as our fragile network ages and severe weather events become more commonplace, the price of repairing the damage goes up. But with your support, our teams continue to battle the elements to keep our canals and rivers safe and sound for everyone.

"Our teams act based on well-established emergency response principles shared with other responders. We triage calls, locate an incident, send staff to the scene, understand the risks, communicate and co-ordinate with other responders and assess the situation, before taking action."

Peter Rodriguez

See how we responded to Storm Babet
canalrivertrust.org.uk/news-and-views

A momentous year

This year, we're celebrating a 250th anniversary on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal. In 1774, some of the very first sections were completed, including the Bingley Three and Five Rise Locks. Come back in time with Waterfront, as we examine the lives and times behind this extraordinary project.

"I think there's interesting parallels between now and 1774," explains Ruth Garret, our heritage advisor for Yorkshire and the North-East. "Today, we have a cost of living crisis after a pandemic, major wars, a green revolution and big infrastructure challenges like HS2."

"Back in 1774, there were hunger and bread riots after years of failed harvests. The American War of Independence was about to start causing a big economic shock to booming transatlantic ports like Liverpool. Then we embarked on this incredibly ambitious transport project. The Leeds & Liverpool is the longest canal connecting two UK cities. And it helped kick-start the industrial revolution by carrying lime, coal and finished textiles across the North."

Bill Froggatt, our heritage adviser for the North-West, picks up the story: "Ever since Liverpool's first dock opened in 1716, Liverpool's authorities were looking to improve inland waterway trade. They needed easy access to the Wigan coal fields and connections to emerging mill towns like Burnley and Blackburn. Meanwhile, over in Yorkshire influential merchants like John Stanhope and John Hustler wanted to bring in cheap coal and lime to build and power their mills in Bradford, then take their finished textiles to Liverpool and across the world."

Bill says these shared interests brought both sides of the Pennines together and construction of the canal began in early November 1770 at Halsall in Lancashire.

In 1773, the first navigable section opened for business between Skipton and Bingley, an occasion marked by bellringing, bonfires and illuminations. A Bingley newspaper reported that the canal immediately delivered on the promise of cheaper goods; two boat loads of coal from Skipton were sold for half the previous price.

But it's 1774; the year of most significant progress, that we're celebrating in our 250th Anniversary. This was when a connection between the Liverpool docks and the Wigan coal fields first opened. In Bingley there were more celebrations as the famous Three Rise and Five Rise locks opened. This section also boasted other fine engineering achievements including the Two Rise locks and Seven Arches Aqueduct at Dowley Gap.

But early optimism for swift completion was ill founded. After war in America, Liverpool's trade suffered deeply. The route was altered to take in developing industry in East Lancashire and huge challenges like building Foulridge Tunnel and Burnley Embankment were still to come. The canal only fully connected the two cities in 1816.

Despite all these early challenges, the wide-boats and locks of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal eventually proved a huge commercial success, continuing to carry bulk goods right up to 1972. But by then the leisure revolution was already underway and a new era for the canal was about to begin which has lasted until the present day.



Image Supplied by National Waterways Archive, Canal & River Trust

Engineering works such as the Bingley Three and Five Rise Locks were described by a newspaper at the time as being 'the noblest works of the kind that perhaps are to be found in the same extent in the universe'.

istockphoto

Beyond the barn door

Barn owls may not be the first birds you might expect to find along our waterways, but these beautiful icons of our countryside are thriving along the Aire & Calder Navigation. It's all thanks to a 30-year-long project to provide them with nest boxes and rough grasslands full of shrews, voles and mice to feed on. And thanks to your support, we've recently given these well-established homes a much-needed makeover.

Last year, one of our ecologists, Phillippa Baron, spent around £5,000 in replacing 12 nest boxes mounted on new telegraph poles along the Aire & Calder, just below the path of the M62 between Castleford and Goole.

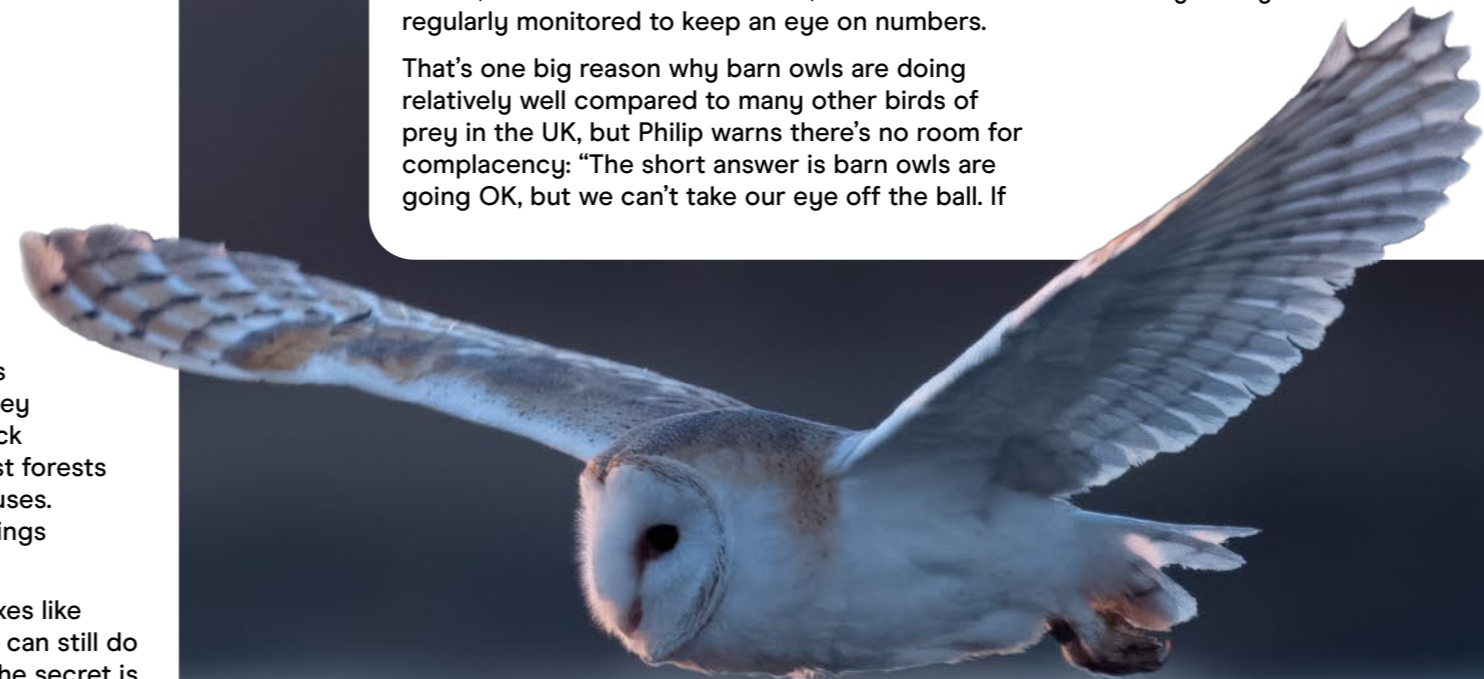
These nest boxes, alongside others mounted on farmland trees, have been helping to attract impressive numbers of barn owls, kestrels, little owls and tawny owls ever since the partnership project between the Wildlife Conservation Partnership and British Waterways began and first installed the nestboxes back in the 1990s. Now 80% of the boxes are regularly occupied.

Every summer, licensed barn owl and bird handlers like Philip Cannings from the Wildlife Conservation Partnership, check nests, and measure the number of chicks and fledglings produced, before weighing

and ringing young birds so their progress can be monitored in years to come.

"Actually, the name barn owl is a bit of a misnomer," says Philip. "Because they only moved into barns and farm buildings after many of the old oak tree cavities they would normally nest in were lost, way back around the time of King Henry VIII, as vast forests were cut down for building ships and houses. Now, sadly, many of those old farm buildings have been lost too.

"But if you give them enough nesting boxes like these and suitable hunting grounds, they can still do very well, raising more than one brood. The secret is getting the habitat and the nesting site to coincide. That's why, as well as renovating and maintaining



iStockphoto

the nest boxes, the project has improved the wild, overgrown grasslands along the rural Aire & Calder towpath adjoining farm fields and hedgerows.

"Barn owls need lots of long tussocky grasses that then fall in on themselves and create a thatch at the bottom," continues Philip. "That's where mice, voles and shrews can breed very rapidly with all sorts of other plants, insects and amphibians to feed on. If you have plenty of these small mammals, you have plenty of food for barn owl chicks."

The sites on the Aire & Calder Navigation are part of a nationwide network of barn owl breeding sites up and down the country, and Philip says that he and his colleagues have personally installed well over 4,000 nest boxes nationwide, all of which are regularly monitored to keep an eye on numbers.

That's one big reason why barn owls are doing relatively well compared to many other birds of prey in the UK, but Philip warns there's no room for complacency: "The short answer is barn owls are going OK, but we can't take our eye off the ball. If

we stopped the nest box schemes and managing habitats, the situation could reverse very quickly. As apex predators, owls depend on having a strong ecosystem below them. But I'm quite hopeful for their future.

"Farmers have always been quite keen on barn owls because they offer some natural pest control. And with changes in agricultural policy, they are now being encouraged to boost biodiversity on their farms, so in the long term, the future could look bright for them."

Next time you're out on a rural towpath this summer, look out at dawn or dusk and you might just be lucky enough to see a barn owl hunting beside a waterway near you.

Since 1998, the Aire & Calder nest boxes have fledged **over 180 young barn owls and over 130 young kestrels**

The barn owl is specially protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, making it unlawful to disturb nests or young. Inspection of nest sites can only be undertaken by fieldworkers holding a licence. All fieldworkers shown in these images hold this licence.



Getting active by water

With your support, we're teaming up with Sport England to make it easier for people in urban canal communities to get active. Using the power of sport, we're looking to bring a range of activities and facilities to our canal banks, removing barriers to healthy living.

"It's a powerful partnership," explains Katrina Hull, our health, sport and connectivity partner, "because we'll be increasing participation in communities facing the biggest health challenges. We have good local links on the ground, so we're able to listen to what people need, and make the most of our canal spaces to help them do whatever they want to do."

With Sport England offering £1.67m in funding over the next three years, the potential to get more communities active is huge, and we're already gearing up to start delivering this spring. "It's already proven that getting active by water has many benefits for physical and mental health," explains Katrina.

"And we're not expecting everyone to be Olympians. A prescription to join one of our many local walking groups is a great place to start."

"Importantly, we start with understanding our communities and what might be preventing participation. For instance, a women's group in Nottingham told us that not being able to swim was holding them back. So instead, we're going to remove that fear of the water, by taking them for swimming lessons at a local pool, to build up their confidence."

Providing affordable sporting facilities to sustain participation is another key part the programme, and local engagement co-ordinator, Sara Ponting is excited about a new paddle sport hub in Wigan, for young people: "We're still confirming final plans, but we anticipate there will be a pontoon and storage facility filled with kayaks, canoes and paddleboards, plus changing rooms and toilets that will make it much easier to get afloat."

"The project will also train and develop local volunteers to deliver the activities long after the project funding ends. Water safety is a big part of the programme, as we have a lot of problems on the Wigan flight with

youngsters swimming on hot summer days, so hopefully this facility will give them a safer way to get on the water."

Sara is also working to provide a similar facility in Rochdale, particularly aimed at young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Meanwhile, in Gloucester, there are plans to make an existing paddle sports pontoon more accessible to people with disabilities and we've been consulting local charity Sailing 4 Disabled on a suitable design.

These exciting plans for 2024 are only the start, and we'll be working with local groups across our 2,000 mile network, to unite everyone in creating a healthier, happier nation by water.



Paying back canal communities.

Thanks to a partnership with the Ministry of Justice, people on probation are helping to give our canals a huge makeover. By improving towpaths, painting locks, picking litter or removing graffiti they are doing work to maintain canals in their local community, and giving back to society.

As national partnerships manager, Simon Papprell explains, it's a win-win-agreement that supplements the existing canal workforce, delivers restorative justice and offers people on probation a chance to pay for their crimes and give back to society. He tells us: "We've had an informal relationship with the ministry for many years now, but after lockdown, they were looking for a national partner. And with over 2,000 miles of canal to care for we had lots of work, right in the urban communities where probationers mainly live.

"Community payback will give canals up to 50,000 hours of work this year, up to 200,000 hours in 2024, and up to 300,000 hours of work by 2025. Dozens of teams are already hard at work on local canals from East London to East Lancashire and the Tees. There's only positive feedback from our staff, the public and probationers."

One way of measuring the difference the probationers can make are Green Flag awards. Over 700 miles of canals have gained this important benchmark for the quality of the green space they provide. But winning or keeping Green Flags is a massive task as canals need constant maintenance all year round. And that's where community payback can help.

On the Dudley No1 Canal in the Black Country, Ian Hodgkin and his

community payback team could be bringing us closer to a Green Flag win. "What you need for this role is patience," says Ian. "I can show people how to paint a lock, cut back brambles or keep the canal-edge weed-free, but the skill is managing people.

"Some are embarrassed to be here and want it over with. Others know time goes quicker if you work hard. Some want to do as little as possible. When you get challenging behaviour, it's about showing authority. The job must come up to my spec. We rarely send people home to their probation officer or back to court, but it is an option. We are strict. The work is unpaid, and they do a 7-hour day, over a 7 to 20-day stint. Around 60% of people on probation are still in employment so they need to give up their weekends for months at a time. It is a punishment. But it also gives back to the community."

Ian shows us his impressive 'before and after' photos: "Generally, they take pride in what they do, he says. "The guy we've got on the strimmer today does a fantastic job. And being outdoors by water makes the team feel good too. You like to think that we give people some direction in life. And who knows, some might even volunteer for the Trust when they've done their time or apply for a job in the future."

"I don't want trouble anymore. I'm local and come down the canal with my daughter to ride our bikes, I want to do something worthwhile.

It's better than putting people in prison. Then people lose their jobs, lose their homes. It's a waste of a life and a big cost.

But we do a good day's work cleaning up the canal and I go home knowing I've done something useful."

'Joe', a member of Ian's team of probationers.



Community payback in numbers



up to **300,000** hours of work by 2025.



40% more

hours being delivered above what our volunteers already give us.

A dramatic revival for Digbeth



PEAKY BLINDERS

creator and writer, Steven Knight CBE, has thrilling plans to transform Birmingham's canals, close to his new Digbeth Loc. Studios.

By restoring historic canalside buildings, he aims to grow a new film, TV and music industry in the area, create jobs and make the canal a destination for all to enjoy.

"In the 19th century, my family were narrowboat people" says Steven, explaining his canal connections. "Canals are part of my palette. They add context to a story, texture to a scene, or scale to a shot. Water makes the sound great. At the end of the first-ever episode of Peaky Blinders someone is shot and falls into a canal boat. That made people think 'oh this is something different'."

Steven has already used Digbeth Loc. Studios to shoot parts of his new series This Town, a music-drama set in the early 1980s era of ska and two-tone. "Birmingham is the only place I would ever start a studio," he says. "And This Town is my love letter to the place I grew up in, an era I lived through and characters I knew. It's about people fighting family ties, racism and violence pressing in on them. Their way out is forming a band and getting famous."

In fact, the studios are all about bringing Steven's productions home. They occupy a wonderful former canal warehouse, once owned by Fellows Morton and Clayton, the famous canal goods carriers. "Everyone who sees the building goes 'Wow!'", says Steven. "The roof is the shape of a narrowboat's bow facing the water. We want to use the building to help keep this stretch of the Dudley No.1 Canal alive."

"We'll use boats to transport equipment or scenery into the studios. Instead of catering vans for cast and crew we'll have narrowboats serving up street food. And if we light up the towpath so people feel more

comfortable, it will be open to local people with cafés and bars at night.

"A business like ours should help to maintain the canal system," Steven continues. "Over the water we're creating the new home of the BBC's MasterChef. But first, we've reinforced the canal walls and done our bit for our local stretch. It would be a terrible shame if canals were to fall back into disrepair. They were an amazing achievement, connecting people like the original internet. In the 19th century Digbeth developed around the canals and thrived because of them. We want to make that happen again today."



"Our ambitions are very big. We'll put on big international productions here, like the upcoming 'Peaky Blinders' film and create hundreds of jobs for youngsters from Digbeth."

© Time and Space

Barrie's Jubilee gift

If you've ever visited the famous Caen Hill Lock flight on the Kennet & Avon Canal, you may have passed by our young woodland, planted in 2012 to mark the Queen's Jubilee. For years, canal enthusiast and nature lover, Barrie Barrett, was a regular visitor. And the future of Jubilee Wood is now more secure after he kindly left a generous gift in his Will to care for it in years to come.

Over the last twelve years, Barrie, born and bred in the nearby village of Rowde, looked on with pride as 30,000 native oak, birch hornbeam, chestnut, cherry, crab apple and ash trees have gently grown and matured on the site.

His friend, neighbour and Will executor, Di Buckland, remembers: "Barrie and I have known each for most of my life. When my husband died forty years ago, you could almost say Barrie and his wife adopted me. They looked after me so well.

"I'd describe Barrie as a real country chap. When he was a little boy, he used to play on the lane leading down to the canal. He loved wildlife and everything to do with the canal. When the wood

was established, we went down and helped to plant some trees. Later, Barrie would go down there to see the deer, foxes and rabbits. He even gave guided walks along the canal."

That's where many of our Canal & River Trust colleagues got to know Barrie too, like ecologist Laura Mullholland. She says: "I remember going round to Barrie's house to see his collection of canal photos, documents and archive with our heritage adviser at the time. And he was clearly really, really enthusiastic about the canal and tree planting.

"Then a few years later after his wife passed away, he got in touch again and we said to him, why don't you come down to

the woods with us and we'll plant another tree in her memory. I think he was very pleased with that."

And Di feels that's as much of a tribute as Barrie would now want too. "He wouldn't want money wasting on anything that's not practical. He would have been happy with an English tree next to his wife."

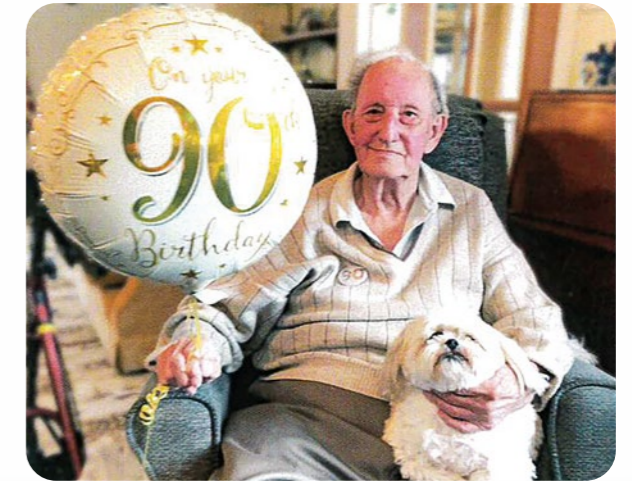
With £20,000 left by Barrie to help maintain the wood in years to come, there's plenty of room for growth at Jubilee Woods. The mix of broadleaf, native deciduous and fruit trees is now taking shape. Yet there's a constant need for replanting every few years as some trees die, or others fall victim to disease like ash-dieback.

A dynamic group of volunteers will also benefit from Barrie's support. Every year, they help to clear tree guards as trunks grow stouter, remove competing brambles from around the roots and mow back pathways through the wood, so local people can explore and look for woodland wildlife that's now making a home here.

"We've got harvest mice that make nests within the tree guards," says Laura. "And amazing wasp spiders

that have this lovely yellow and black stripe on their abdomen and make huge webs between the grass tussocks. There are badgers, hedgehogs, slow worms and grass snakes. And lots of frogs, toads, smooth newts and dragonflies. It's a few years off yet, but there's a colony of barbastelle bats nearby that could roost here eventually, as they are only found in woodland."

With willow sculptures, a bandstand, room for forest schools and picnic benches, the wood is already a big part of the local community. And now, just as Barrie would have wanted, it will continue to grow and welcome the next generation to the canalside.



Barrie at his 90th birthday celebration

Find out more about how a gift in your Will can help us transform places and change lives

canalrivertrust.org.uk/giftsinwills



Eashani

Community roots engagement coordinator, Eashani says: "There are lots of proactive groups around the Welsh Harp but for the first time we've brought everyone together to pick up litter safely. We've filled hundreds of bin bags with smaller items. Contractors will come later to pick out bigger items like tyres and fridges. Soon, we'll have a clean reservoir where we can build nesting sites for wildlife like great crested grebes and little terns."



Jimmy

As duty manager for contractors Kier, Jimmy leads the team repairing the sluice gates. "We're working seven days a week to complete the works as soon as possible. They are vital to safely regulate water levels in the reservoir and prevent flooding. So far, we've drained 400 Olympic swimming pools of water and rescued around eight tonnes of fish. Today, we're building retaining walls around the gates to allow us to repair the chains and rods that operate the reservoir's sluices."



Simon

"I'm a mud larker and run a YouTube vlog called Si-finds, showing what I find on the Thames. I stay in touch with the Trust whenever they drain a canal, so I'm happy to come down today. This a Victorian reservoir so some of the finds will be 1850-ish. Stoneware, glass lemonade bottles, or medicines, as everyone had a miracle cure back then. It's best to look by a bridge, or swimming jetty where people throw things in."



Ralph

"I'm in the local Pioneer Scout Group. We canoe on the Welsh Harp, so it's quite a shock to see it empty. Today, I've found an American Signal Crayfish. Apparently, they are an invasive species, so you're not supposed to put them back in the water. I live nearby, but you never expect to find something like this in the middle of the city. It's great to have somewhere full of wildlife on your doorstep."



Daniella

"I founded 'Friends of the Welsh Harp' in 2013. There was a lot of litter here and no-one doing anything about it. David Attenborough's 'Blue Planet' galvanised people to get involved. I mean, when you see rubbish like this, how can you not? Sadly, it's a microcosm of what's happening around the world. I don't have much hope for our planet, but one has to try. It's great that so many people have come together today."



Colin

"I come down here with my dog to walk every day. It's wonderful to see what they are doing here. I've been involved in the local education centre and the cubs and scouts here since the 90s. You've got the birds, the trees, a complete shrine to wildlife, within the North Circular. We need to get everyone together to make sure that kids can have that first-hand experience of nature."

Talking on the towpath

Brent Reservoir, also known as the Welsh Harp, close to Wembley in London, is usually a precious oasis of blue water, green space in the heart of the city. However, this winter, thanks to players of People's Postcode Lottery, it has been drained to allow vital works on the sluices controlling water levels in the reservoir. This offered a rare chance to remove years of accumulated rubbish and protect local wildlife. Waterfront eagerly joined in as a host of local volunteers gathered to help pick up the litter.





Changing career on canals

Our charity's workforce is as diverse as the 2,000 miles of canal we care for. That's why we are actively recruiting over 50s to find new work on our waterways. As an age accredited employer, we're offering people like Spencer Goddard, the opportunity to share their skills and life experiences.

"I started out in the 1980s as a stockbroker," says 58-year-old Spencer, "just as the 'Big Bang' happened and everything became computerised. Then I moved into investment management working in places including Hong Kong and Australia, and eventually came back to London heading up a central London office. But then the credit crunch came. And having been through crashes in the 80s, 90s and early 2000s I was disillusioned, so decided it was time to move on.

"I took some time out travelling and so on. And then last year I saw the advert for the Canal & River Trust. And having always been a passionate boater in everything from narrowboats to dinghies to yachts, I thought 'that really appeals to me'."

Initially, Spencer applied for a fundraising role, helping recruit Friends like you. But during his interview, it became apparent that his leadership, finance, technology and project management skills could have a bigger impact.

"So now I am team leader on contactless giving," continues Spencer. "Very few people carry cash anymore, so now the Trust is using technology to raise funds, giving all our team members an app, which anyone can tap to donate. A lot of my job is about winning hearts and minds and showing people that fundraising is part of everybody's job, now that we can't rely so much in future on government funding.

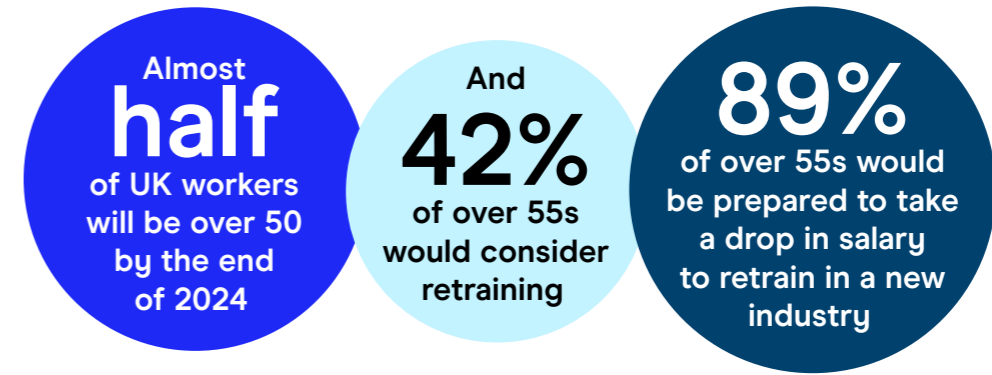
"I've always run big projects, where we're rolling new things out and getting people to buy into them. That's my skill set. I understand the tech, the compliance issues, and the regulations. Increasingly, employers are looking for those transferable skills. Although the challenges are different, the Canal & River Trust are going through a huge change, just as banking did.

"I had no thoughts of going back into financial services. I didn't want to be under that pressure, but I still wanted a challenge. I've always said I can't see myself retiring. It's just the nature of who I am. But in ten years' time, I could see a combination of work and volunteering. We'll see!

"In the meantime, it's a fantastic team, a great bunch of people. Very motivated, focused and professional. Everyone looks out for each other, and the charity has fantastic ethos of support training. So, whether you are an engineer, ecologist, hydrologist, surveyor, buyer, marketer, or in admin or finance there are plenty of opportunities whatever your age or background may be.

"I know they are actively recruiting for fundraisers, engineers and project managers, particularly in places like London. Plus, you get to spend time on the towpath, which is wonderful for a keen boater like me."

The over 50s opportunity



Source: The Unretirement Uprising – The retirement rebellion that could save our workplaces, by 55/Redefined



If you would like to work by water, find out what you could bring to our multi-generational workforce. Take a look at our vacancies now.

canalrivertrust.org.uk/our-jobs



Barry, fifth from left

Barry Perkins

Green-fingered volunteer, Barry, is part of our 'garden party' in Leeds. "We identify areas that could be improved, clear them, plant trees and wildflowers or cultivate fruits, vegetables and herbs for local people and boaters to take home. We hope to save the Trust money by growing our own plants and seedlings in a polytunnel. Being outside is good for the soul and it's satisfying to make a neglected area beautiful."



Pictured from Left to right

Adam Smith, David Malbon, Martin Carney – Site Supervisor Volunteering, Ian Rowley, Anthony Wingrove, Des Yates, Ron Foulkes and Simon Martin – AOM

Harecastle Team

Ian Rowley, Ron Foulkes and Des Yates, guide boaters through Harecastle Tunnel. "It's a role that comes with real responsibility. It's a very old, narrow tunnel and there's a lot of moving parts, so there's no room for error. We brief the boaters beforehand, operate the doors, and monitor boats passing through. Many of us have a background in heavy industry and safety, so it's a responsibility we enjoy."



Rob Hetherington

Rob is 'Mr. Leicester', a ranger on the city's towpath and lock keeper on the River Soar. "I've been interested in canals since I was a child, eventually living aboard a narrowboat. Volunteering is my way of reconnecting with the waterways. My ranger role in the city involves litter-picking and providing information to boaters and towpath users, it's very enjoyable, it gets me out, keeps me fit and I feel I'm making a valuable contribution."



Lorraine Leckenby

Lorraine is a towpath ranger on the Grand Union Canal in London. "Our group is well-known here in Alperton. When we pick litter and keep the towpath tidy, people feel safer and happier. I work in fashion and have organised uniforms for us to wear, so people recognise us and stop for a chat. I also write a blog about the people we help along the way. It's never boring on the towpath!"



David Palfrey

David puts his canoeing skills to good use in Wales and the South-West. "I've been canoeing for years and that happened to be what the Trust was looking for and I lead paddling sessions across the region. I also lead walks and love chatting to the public. I'd say just go ahead and get involved. The Trust is very good at letting you contribute from day one."



Robert Fisher

River Weaver lock keeper, Robert, wears many hats for our charity. "After feeling like a prisoner in my own home during lockdown, I joined one of the charity's guided walking groups. I soon began making friends, and I firmly believe it was being by water that brought me out of my shell. There are so many roles you can take on and you really feel part of the team."

Volunteer voices

In September, we celebrated some of our charity's unsung heroes at the annual Marsh Charitable Trust Awards. They recognise the individuals and teams that go above and beyond for their local waterway. We simply couldn't care for canals without these wonderful people. If you'd like to get involved, here's a little flavour of what it's like to volunteer for us.

Want to give volunteering a try?
Drop in at canalrivertrust.org.uk/welcome-sessions

The Florence Nightingale of canals



In the middle of the 20th century, Sister Mary Ward nursed working boat families, running a free medical dispensary in her home in Stoke Bruerne, on the banks of the Grand Union Canal.

Mary grew up in the village as the daughter of a rope and twine manufacturer. When she was ready to leave home, she spent her formative years picking up nursing and caring skills. When she eventually returned, she was then able to take on a position as an assistant nurse to a local doctor.



Part of the reason she came back to Stoke Bruerne was to take over her ailing father's business and home near Lock 15 on the Grand Union Canal. And this is where she also began to administer care to the working boat families who passed through.



Mary worked in some of the most difficult conditions imaginable, attending to the sick

without gas, electricity or a telephone, while paying for her medical supplies out of her own pocket. It would be years before the canal companies recognised her incredible contribution, eventually giving her a stipend of £2 per week.

In 1951, Sister Mary was awarded the British Empire Medal for her services to the boating community. She was once quoted as saying: "You can't take me away from boat people. There isn't one of them wouldn't die for me, or one I wouldn't die for."



Sister Mary eventually retired in 1962. Today, this remarkable figure is remembered at our museum in Stoke Bruerne, where her headstone sits in our memorial garden, close to the Grand Union Canal, where she made such a difference to so many lives.

Images Supplied by National Waterways Archive, Canal & River Trust