

Speech by John Dodwell, a Trustee of the Canal & River Trust, on the occasion of the 40th Celebrations of the Restoration of the Caldon Canal on Sunday September 28 2014 at Cheddleton Lock in Staffordshire

Perhaps you thought the speeches were over - but someone has to be last! 40 years ago I was here representing The Inland Waterways Association when the then chairman of British Waterways formally re-opened this lock. Now I am back as one of the ten national Trustees of Canal & River Trust, the successor to British Waterways. I've been back before but this time I have brought my 1942 built old Birmingham tug HELEN – as you can see. My wife and I are going to be spending the better part of the next week on the Caldon, doing our bit for the local tourist economy.

When I first saw the Froghall Branch, it was derelict and part was piped. The section coming out from Stoke-on-Trent was only just usable. So I want to add my thanks to others who have praised Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire County Council and others for enabling the 1970s restoration. There were many voluntary heroes and heroines in those days – some are here (Hello, Harry!) – and I'm pleased to see Ben Fradley's wife Glenys here as Ben was a doughty warrior for the Canal, helped by the Stoke-on-Trent Boat Club, the Inland Waterways Association and others.

The involvement of the local authorities has continued. On my way here by boat, I saw the towpath improvement works being carried out by Staffordshire County Council, through accessing central Government money for building links to national parks. Canal & River Trust does basic maintenance of towpaths even though the public don't directly pay to use them so it seems rather appropriate to me that – on behalf of the public – the local authority has procured the funds for the improvements.

Let's now look forward. The Caldon and Uttoxeter Canal Trust wants to continue the restoration back towards the original terminus at Uttoxeter. As a member of that Trust, I personally support their aim but I bring no bags of gold from Canal & River Trust; our main responsibility has to be to the 2,000 miles of navigable canal and river we look after.

However, our charitable objects include restoration and we support the concept – just look at our video "Water Adds Value" and the work we do to encourage the idea that "Restoration is Good" through offering training, including in fund raising. The work of revitalising the Churnet valley and the area around it needs to continue and we have seen elsewhere the benefits restored waterways bring to rural economies. That's one reason why I am pleased to see here today Councillor Gill Heath from Staffordshire's Rural Affairs and Waterways Group; Charlotte Atkins, CRT's local waterways partnership chair who can help draw the strings together, along with Councillor Ruth Rosenau, Stoke's Cabinet member for regeneration and Stoke's Chief Executive Officer. For I see that it is the local authorities, in response to public pressure to restore the Uttoxeter Canal for the benefit of local people, who will be at the forefront of finding the money – working through the LEP and by applying for Government grants – along with, I hope, the Heritage Lottery Fund.

In fact, work has already started – with the lock into Froghall Basin being restored a decade ago. More recently, I'm told by Steve Wood, Chair of the Restoration Committee (who for some strange reason was put on my boat!) that Bridge 70 near Crumpwood.– an original

canal bridge – is nearly restored, partly through a week's holiday by members of the IWA's Waterways Recovery Group. Can you believe that people use their holidays to restore canals? Indeed, Steve tells me that this very weekend volunteers have given up their time and are working on the towpath down there. They prefer practical work to listening to people like me!

So, I say, all power to the volunteers. To adapt a phrase "let's give them the money for the equipment they need and they'll finish the job".P So I conclude by saying "Onward to Uttoxeter!"