



## PRESS RELEASE

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### Canal & River Trust Announces Living Waterways Awards Winners

The winners of the 2016 Living Waterways Awards, sponsored by Kier, Arcadis, CPC Civils and Fountains, were announced at a ceremony at Birmingham Town Hall last night (14 September 2016).

Launched by the Canal & River Trust in February, the *Living Waterways Awards* seek to recognise the most exciting and inspiring waterway-based improvement projects across the UK.

Richard Parry, chief executive of the Canal & River Trust, explains: "The Living Waterways Awards celebrate the individuals, communities and organisations that have done the most to make a difference to the nation's rivers, canals, lochs, lakes, reservoirs and docks, making them exciting places to live, learn and spend time."

After a series of visits and assessments, which saw expert judges travel across the country from Norfolk to Gloucester, and from London to Cheshire, an independent panel of experts, led by Christopher Rodrigues CBE, selected its finalists for the 2016 *Living Waterways Awards*.

From inspirational visitor centres and vibrant theatrical performances, to innovative education projects and pioneering environmental initiatives, winners are listed under nine award categories:

**1. Art & Interpretation** – Winner: Mikron Theatre Annual Waterways Tour 2015, Runner-up: Floating Cinema on Tour, Commended: Stoke Bruerne Interpretation Project

**2. Community & Volunteering** – Winner: Macclesfield Canal Green Flag, Runner-up: Helping Hedgerows, Commended: IWA Northampton Arm Adoption; and IWA North Staffs & South Cheshire Work Party

**3. Contribution to the Built Environment** – Winner: Porter Brook Pocket Park, Commended: Saltisford Canal Arm Restoration

**4. Education & Learning** – Winner: Duke of Edinburgh's Award Gold Residential, Runner-up: Waterworks, Commended: Towpath Walks

**5. Natural Environment** – Winner: Fenny Compton Butterflies, Runner-up: Essex River Wardens

**6. Recreation & Tourism** – Winner: Dudley Canal & Tunnel Trust, Runner-up: Tall Ships Gloucester, Commended: Birmingham Cycle Revolution

**7. Restoration & Historic Environment** – Winner: Conserve Nantwich Aqueduct, Commended: North Walsham & Dilham Canal Restoration

**8. Special Award** – Volunteers Flood In

**9. Outstanding Achievement Award** – Di Skilbeck MBE

At the ceremony, the Canal & River Trust also presented the Volunteer of the Year Award in partnership with the Marsh Christian Trust to Peter Bruton\*. Peter has volunteered on the waterways in the West Midlands since 2004 and is a lead volunteer on the Heritage Working Boats team and volunteer boat skipper.

Brian Marsh, chairman of the Marsh Christian Trust, explains: “The Marsh Christian Trust is delighted to support the Canal & River Trust in recognising the commitment and support provided so willingly by dedicated volunteers.

“I’m delighted to say that Peter Bruton has been voted as 2016 Canal & River Trust Volunteer of the Year. Amongst many other things, Peter helps to maintain the Trust’s fleet of heritage boats, moving them around the waterways, representing the Trust at numerous festivals and events.

“Peter’s enthusiasm and energy is limitless and the profile he has generated for the waterways and for the Trust is phenomenal. He is a well deserving ambassador of the waterways.”

Further details of the 2016 Living Waterways Awards can be found at <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/living-waterways-awards-2016>

**ENDS**

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**Notes to editors**

\*The Volunteer of the Year Award is judged separately to the Living Waterways Awards.

The Canal & River Trust is the guardian of 2,000 miles of historic waterways across England and Wales. We are among the largest charities in the UK, maintaining the nation’s third largest

collection of Listed structures, as well as museums, archives, navigations and hundreds of important wildlife sites.

We believe that our canals and rivers are a national treasure and a local haven for people and wildlife. It is our job to care for this wonderful legacy – holding it in trust for the nation in perpetuity and giving people a greater role in the running of their local waterways

[www.canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk)

### **\*\*\* Art & Interpretation Awards**

#### **Winner: Mikron Theatre Annual Waterways Tour 2015**

For 46 years the Mikron Theatre company has toured the waterways network, presenting high quality, accessible theatre in unlikely or unfamiliar places.

Travelling aboard the 80-year old narrowboat 'Tyseley' each summer, and further afield by van in the spring and autumn, in 2015 Mikron toured two commissioned shows: 'Raising Agents – 100 years of the Women's Institute'; and 'One of Each – the British love affair with Fish and Chips'.

These productions attracted record audiences of 16,553 people (25 per cent over target) at 150 different venues across England, 50 taking place by a canal or river and attended by 6,077 people.

Mikron often operates a 'pay what you will' collection system after the show, so nobody gets priced out. They attract casual audiences as well as a loyal following, capture media attention and maintain a loyal band of volunteers to help deliver their events.

*"Mikron has kept its innovation and energy alive for over four decades, maintaining performance standards year after year with original commissioning and a regularly refreshed cast.*

*Many of their venues, and some of their plots relate directly to the waterways, adding significantly to the numbers who visit our canals and rivers, and enriching the experience available to people who live there."*

#### **Runner-up: Floating Cinema on Tour**

After three years on London's waterways, in 2015 the Floating Cinema, a 60ft wide-beam barge with a purpose-built 16-seater auditorium, went on an eight-week tour, travelling from Brentford to Bristol and back.

As well as cinema screenings, talks and workshops, the tour hosted two specially commissioned arts projects designed to engage people with their waterway and its history: one focusing on local distinctiveness, contrasting archive footage of the local waterways en-route with the current situation; the other, created a digital library of sounds heard along the waterway.

Around 4,500 people, of a wide range of ages, attended their well promoted events, and 94 per cent of those surveyed said they were likely to return to the waterway again.

#### **Commended: Stoke Bruerne Interpretation Project**

Stoke Bruerne, with its Canal Museum, Blisworth Tunnel and collection of canal heritage structures, is a popular destination but lacked outside information to help visitors engage with canal history and further enjoy their visit.

This two-year project backed by Heritage Lottery Funding, first staged a series of events designed to involve local people in the project, including a Reminiscence Day, guided walks, two canal heritage festivals, a Geocaching event, two 'Big Draw' days and school photography project. Twelve interpretation panels, information posts and directional signs have been created, with help from the local blacksmith who fabricated the frameworks on site and introduced intriguing waterway creatures made of wrought iron.

### **\*\*\*Community & Volunteering Award**

#### **Winner: Macclesfield Canal Green Flag**

The prestigious Green Flag Award scheme recognises the very best green spaces in the UK and is usually awarded to parks and gardens, making the Macclesfield Canal Partnership's ambitions to gain the award for their waterway pioneering.

Following an initial investigation by one volunteer to see if it was possible to fulfil the Green Flag requirements, a community working group was established to prepare the canal for the comprehensive assessment process. A management plan with full operational and maintenance requirements for the canal was also developed.

Regular work parties soon set about addressing each area to be assessed, including environment, cleanliness, sustainability and community involvement.

Seven volunteer groups, which still continue to meet regularly, carried out maintenance and improvements along the 26-mile waterway. These groups consisted of 130 volunteers and 45 Brother employees, donating a total of 2,291 volunteer hours.

Following an assessment by Green Flag judges, in July 2015 the canal was awarded Green Flag status, becoming the first ever waterway to receive such a mark of quality.

*"There is no doubt that this project has been inspiring. The vast majority of the work has been completed by volunteers and having achieved this coveted recognition, both staff and volunteer enthusiasm and pride has reached new levels.*

*"The ongoing annual assessment pushes them to keep up the high standard or risk losing their hard earned Green Flag status and the team has already started the process to gain the award for the Peak Forest Canal.*

*"It has become an objective within the Canal & River Trust to do the same throughout the country."*

#### **Runner-up: Helping Hedgerows**

The Canal & River Trust cares for over 900 miles of hedgerows, many over 200 years old. With the help of numerous volunteer groups, this national three-year project, backed by the People's Postcode Lottery, has surveyed these hedgerows and enhanced sections to improve biodiversity, revive countryside skills and help reverse the UK's hedgerow decline.

Nearly 20km of hedgerow have been improved, 23 hedge-laying training courses delivered, 188 volunteers trained and 736 volunteers involved, far exceeding the project's original targets.

The community engagement has been wide ranging - reaching young people, community pay-back and groups with disabilities or health issues, all demonstrating a keen interest in caring for their local canal and the wildlife which depends on it.

### **Commended: IWA Northampton Arm Adoption**

To improve the canal corridor for all users, in 2013 the IWA Northampton Branch asked the Canal & River Trust if it could adopt the 4.5-mile long Northampton Arm, one of the longest stretches of canal to be adopted by a volunteer group.

Regular volunteer work parties soon began to tackle litter and vegetation clearance, as well as painting projects.

Over the next two-and-a-half years, 70 work parties made up of 80 volunteers gave 2,900 volunteer hours. They painted all 17 locks and cleared 15 by-weirs, transforming key waterway sites, including the busy Lock 17 in Northampton, ahead of the town's Festival of Water commemorating the waterway's bicentenary.

### **Commended: IWA North Staffs & South Cheshire Work Party**

Although a relatively new and small group, since 2012 the IWA North Staffs & South Cheshire Work Party has completed a staggering amount of restoration work.

In less than two years, they raised 162 work parties to carry out a wide range of improvement projects, with 1,217 volunteer days dedicated and over 200 volunteers involved.

Work parties are open to anyone and are widely advertised in local communities. They take place at a variety of locations and extra work party leaders are trained up so there is always a contingency plan. A central store for equipment has been set up and a good network has been established with other organisations willing to help.

### **\*\*\*Contribution to Built Environment Award**

#### **Winner: Porter Brook Pocket Park**

Porter Brook on the southern edge of Sheffield City Centre had been largely forgotten, lost behind industrial units, derelict plots of land and buried beneath culverts.

As part of Sheffield City's Council's strategy to regenerate its rivers, the culvert was opened over a stretch of the brook hidden beneath a car park, and a thriving new riverside park has been created just five minutes from the City's central train station.

River bed material was redistributed and stabilised using boulders and large woody material, all reclaimed from site. These have created deep scour pools within the channel to ensure habitats remain during low river levels. A good range of aquatic life has since colonised the stream, including wild trout.

The park's layout includes the first section of a new riverside walkway, which is hoped will eventually run the entire length of the brook within the City Centre. Stone terraces allow direct public access to the water's edge, now well used by commuters, local office workers and residents.

Gabion walls make use of local gritstone and slowly release rainwater into the brook, and the park has been designed to flood during extreme weather events, forming part of the City's flood defence strategy.

*"This section of a once forgotten waterway has been returned to a more natural state and transformed into a valuable public green space, with important new wildlife habitats. It also provides an innovative alternative to standard flood defence systems."*

*"Although a relatively small project, it has had a big impact on the urban environment and is being seen as a catalyst for regeneration and further improvements upstream."*

### **Commended: Saltisford Canal Arm Restoration**

The Saltisford Arm Trust has restored the Saltisford Arm, which connects to the Grand Union Canal at Warwick. It is now well used by boats and its successful moorings business is run by the Trust's subsidiary, Saltisford Canal Trading.

The Trust is promoting the use and history of the canal through its visitor centre, extensive waterside gardens, day boat *Saltie II*, and new Cedar Room education hub and meeting space.

Other improvements include a new pedestrian gate, ramp and paths providing access for all, plus landscaping works, commemorative sculptures, oak benches, sensory garden and a community orchard.

### **\*\*\*Education & Learning Award**

#### **Winner: Duke of Edinburgh's Award Gold Residential**

This project on the Birmingham Canal Navigations offers young people aged 16 to 24 the chance to complete the final stage of their Duke of Edinburgh Gold Awards aboard a pair of heritage working boats - one of a number of initiatives by the Coombewood Canal Trust to encourage young people to get involved in the canals.

Participants spend five days afloat with nine others, working as part of a team to move the two boats, supervised by qualified skippers and a Duke of Edinburgh Award assessor.

As well as learning boat handling skills, they meet new people from a range of backgrounds, build relationships, learn about communication and tolerance in close quarters, and look after their own welfare by sharing the cooking, washing and cleaning tasks.

The groups visit waterside destinations and learn about canal ecology and the history of the waterways. In 2015 the story of the Idle Women was a focus for courses and 42 young people took part. A further 10 trips are planned for 2016.

*"This novel approach to bringing young people to the waterways is in its infancy, but is already growing and there is plenty of scope to expand to a wider audience."*

*“The Duke of Edinburgh Award has lots of common goals for independence and relationship building and this project is certainly a fantastic example. The passion of the student we spoke to about his experience has led to him becoming a volunteer at the boat yard.”*

### **Runner-up: Waterworks**

The ‘Waterworks’ project has been training community volunteers to restore a 1.5 km disused section of the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal in Cwmbran, developing a model of volunteering and heritage skills training to support future canal maintenance and restoration.

A programme of on-site and classroom-based training has been delivered by project staff and a range of local specialists. Over 200 volunteers have taken part in all aspects of the restoration, including stone masonry, habitat management and lock gate manufacture.

Young people not in education, employment and training and the long term unemployed, have gained NVQ’s in construction and practical environmental conservation, helping them to employment or further education.

### **Commended: Towpath Walks**

As part of its campaign to maintain public access to the waterways, the Inland Waterways Association has been running guided towpath walks in London for nearly 40 years.

The walks, which have so far brought over 15,000 people to London’s towpaths, enlighten participants in the historical importance of canals and their new role for leisure and tourism. Knowledgeable guides, each with their own area of expertise, fascinate and entertain walkers with stories of the development of nearby neighbourhoods, as well as the canal itself.

Through a long-term collaboration with London Walks, these walks are widely promoted and ranked among the premier guided walks available in the Capital.

## **\*\*\*Natural Environment Award**

### **Winner: Fenny Compton Butterflies**

Volunteers had been maintaining grassland habitats alongside the Oxford Canal at Fenny Compton for many years, but this valuable local wildlife site was suffering increased invasion from scrub.

To help restore the rare calcareous grasslands at Fenny Compton Tunnels Spoil Banks & Meadow, the Canal & River Trust entered into a volunteer adoption agreement with Butterfly Conservation Warwickshire, who were keen to bring back the Grizzled Skipper butterfly to this designated local wildlife site.

Working together with local volunteers from other expert bodies and the Probation Service, Butterfly Conservation Warwickshire has raised 17 work parties, providing nearly 850 hours of volunteer effort and undertaking ecological restoration work across over eight hectares of land.

Large areas of scrub have been cleared and a fantastic mosaic of grasslands created for rare orchids and butterflies, with scrubby woodland edges for breeding birds and deadwood habitats for

fungi, beetles and invertebrates. A large pond was also restored for amphibians, reptiles and dragonflies and a butterfly identification display board installed.

A friends of group has been established, volunteer maintenance work is ongoing, walkers are regularly using the new circular path and early butterfly monitoring work is showing promising results.

*“Spectacular change has been brought about at this canalside local wildlife site, with volunteers from expert bodies collaborating to provide the necessary knowledge and contribution to physical work on the ground.*

*“Its success will hopefully encourage similar restoration and the re-introduction of butterfly habitats elsewhere on the waterway network.”*

### **Runner-up: Essex River Wardens**

In Essex, a network of 170 volunteers has been established to regularly monitor sections of 16 local watercourses. The River Wardens look for signs of pollution, report anything of concern and work with Essex Wildlife Trust to rectify the situation.

Volunteers have also organised litter picks, invasive species removal and social events like canoe trips.

The benefits of their work have been recognised by the Environment Agency and local water companies. These organisations view the project as ‘best practice’ for communities to help care for their local waterways and are now involved in training sessions.

The project is now expanding to include Coastal Wardens.

### **\*\*\*Recreation & Tourism Award**

#### **Winner: Dudley Canal & Tunnel Trust**

The Dudley Canal & Tunnel Trust has championed the restoration, maintenance and enjoyment of this spectacular underground labyrinth of limestone mines and canal tunnels for 55 years.

The Trust’s new £3.7m Portal Visitor Centre at Castle Hill, with museum, gallery, meeting rooms, restaurant and function room, shop and trip boat base, opened in October 2015 and has already doubled the annual number of visitors to the site.

Their trip boat business has been transformed with new covered passenger facilities, and annual uptake has increased by 22 per cent to 85,000. The Trust is now acquiring a fourth boat to offer floating restaurant services and they expect to attract over 130,000 visitors to this Scheduled Ancient Monument site in 2016.

Both the Portal, and the new pedestrian swing bridge offering access across the canal to the Black Country Living Museum, are a key part of ‘The Castle Hill Vision’ to link Dudley Castle & Zoological Gardens, Dudley Tunnel & Limestone Mines and Black Country Living Museum, creating a “Geo-park” in Dudley to rival the Jurassic Coast.



*“This flagship visitor centre accommodates a wide range of activity and has allowed the Trust to grow from employing just two people with five volunteers, to employing 15, with 40 volunteers.”*

*“The site is being successfully promoted to all age groups and we saw evidence of large numbers of young visitors being fascinated with their experience. The Trust certainly deserves to be recognised for their remarkable work to promote and celebrate this important waterways site.”*

### **Runner-up: Tall Ships Gloucester**

The biennial Tall Ships event, established in 2007 to encourage local pride and attract visitors to the regenerated Docks, has grown in size and popularity to become one of the largest on water events in the South West.

The event brings the entire Docks to life, with family entertainment both on and off the water, stalls, catering and music, and gives a significant boost to the local economy.

In 2015 Tall Ships was ticketed for the first time and attracted 125,000 visitors across three days, over six times the number taking part in 2007. Profits were shared with stakeholder partners and the Canal & River Trust.

### **Commended: Birmingham Cycle Revolution**

Birmingham’s 20-year Cycle Revolution strategy aims to make cycling a mainstream form of transport across the city, promoting healthier lifestyles.

Phase one set about creating a network of cycle routes within a 20-minute cycle radius of the city centre. Birmingham’s extensive network of canals formed an important part of this vision, leading to a massive £8million investment to improve 20 miles of towpath.

All weather re-surfacing using local stone has provided an attractive and durable surface, new access ramps have been installed, along with way-finders and energy efficient lighting.

Towpath usage by cyclists has since increased by 35 per cent and a second £3million phase of works started in March 2016.

## **\*\*\*Restoration & Historic Environment Award**

### **Winner: Conserve Nantwich Aqueduct**

Considered to be the gateway to Nantwich, this stunning Grade II\* Listed iron trough aqueduct designed by Thomas Telford, carries the Shropshire Union Canal over the A534 between Nantwich and Chester.

The recent £250,000 community partnership project to refurbish and conserve the 190-year old structure has included: repairs to cracks in the cast and wrought iron elements; replacing a decorative cast iron infill panel and repairing a soffit on the north west corner following a vehicle strike; re-painting the ironwork with a four-coat protective system; brick and stone repairs, plus repointing by skilled stonemasons; and the removal of vegetation from gaps in the masonry.

Well promoted locally, this project was delivered to time and budget and has been extremely well received by the community, with the striking new paint scheme positively boosting perspectives of the town.

Paved paths to the canal have previously been funded, providing good access. Future partnership projects planned include: new interpretation; volunteering to maintain the environment; refurbishing a play area; and a Georgian Festival.

*“This exemplar conservation project has taken great care to respect the significance of the structure, considering all aspects of brick and stone repair and replacement, and a long term paint treatment for the iron parts.*

*“Particular care was taken to ensure no scaffolding was connected to the structure to avoid any damage, and all site operatives were given briefings as to the significance of the structure. And the repairs have reduced the risk of major engineering works being required for some time.”*

### **Commended: North Walsham & Dilham Canal Restoration**

Norfolk’s only locked canal, the largely de-watered North Walsham & Dilham Canal runs for seven miles from its junction with the River Ant at Wayford to its terminus at Swafield.

In 2008 the North Walsham & Dilham Canal Trust formed and began concentrating restoration efforts along the top third, from Ebridge to Swafield. This section had recently been purchased by the Old Canal Company, keen to open up public access to the waterway.

Since then, the mill pond and 1.6km of this wide sailing canal have been re-profiled and are now in water, providing valuable habitats for water fowl, otters, water voles and fish. And permissive paths have been created along the banks.

Lock number four at Spa Common has been re-furbished, the terminus winding area restored, trees and detritus blocking the channel removed, and a further 2km of banks re-profiled.

### **\*\*\*Special Award - Volunteers Flood In**

In the wake of the terrible Boxing Day floods of 2016, large numbers of volunteers and staff from river soaked communities in West Yorkshire and Rochdale, rallied to make their waterways safe and accessible again as quickly as possible.

The scale of the undertaking was immense, but everyone worked together to assess the damage and start removing hazards and litter along almost 100 miles of canals.

On the Rochdale Canal, volunteers worked alongside construction teams to repair to large sections of towpath.

The Calder Navigation Society, Safe Anchor Trust, South Pennine Boat Club and Shire Cruisers reported vital information about damage on the Calder & Hebble.

Young people from Harrogate Army College and Wakefield College helped clear towpaths, while adoption groups at Brookfoot and Volunteer Lock Keepers cleared mud and removed the worst of the damage.

The River Calder’s ‘Big Spring Clean’ tackled large amounts of debris dumped by the floods.

Restoration work is ongoing, but so far over 500 days of volunteer labour has been given, 200 new Canal & River Trust volunteers signed-up and £65,000 donated.

*“While the floods had a devastating impact, what has become apparent from this incredible community response is the love and desire from local communities to help in the rebuild.”*

### **\*\*\* Outstanding Achievement Award - Di Skilbeck MBE**

Di Skilbeck has been involved in the creation and development of the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port for over 42 years.

A former head of The Queens School in Chester, Di was teaching geography and history at Wirral Grammar School for Girls when she found out about the former Victorian port at Ellesmere Port and went to visit it. Horrified by its sad dilapidation she decided to get involved and help the restoration efforts.

In 1974 she joined the North Western Museum of Inland Navigation volunteer group and took part in the very first working party at Ellesmere Port. Since helping to open the ‘Boat Museum’ in 1976, Di’s involvement with the museum has continued to grow and she frequently enlisted girls from her school to help.

One of the most important projects has been the restoration and continued maintenance of the 90-year old wooden horseboat ‘Gifford’. Di frequently dresses in period costume and gives guided tours for museum visitors to show how boat people used to live and work.

In 2012 Di was awarded an MBE for her services to heritage in and 2014 an Honorary Degree of Master of Arts (MA) by Chester University in recognition of her contribution to education in the County. In 1996 she became President of the Boat Museum Society.

Richard Parry, chief executive of the Canal & River Trust: *“Di’s connection and commitment to the Museum stretches right back to the early days of restoring the site, and her inspiring dedication to the Boat Museum Society and its role in the conservation and education of the history of the waterways continues unstinted.*

*“Di has been a stalwart supporter and campaigner for the inland waterways and our industrial heritage. Through her work as a teacher and volunteer she has inspired countless children and helped ensure that these stories are not forgotten.”*