



Canal &
River Trust

PRESS RELEASE

09 September 2017

CHARITY OPENS UP EMPTY WALSALL LOCK TO VISITORS

- **Talk to the charity that's work keeps the Walsall Canal thriving**
- **Rare opportunity to venture to the bottom of a drained canal lock at special visitor open day**
 - **A day of fun with activities on offer for all the family**

Vital repair work is underway by the charity the Canal & River Trust, as part of a £10,000 project to keep the Walsall Canal in good condition for the local community.

As part of the work, the Trust is holding a special event to give visitors the chance to explore Lock 5 on this flight of locks, which runs through the heart of Walsall in the West Midlands. The Trust's team of experts, including engineers, apprentices and ecologists, will be on hand to explain about the history of the canal in Walsall, the work of the charity and the impressive works carried out to the lock.

Additionally, visitors to the event will be able to try their hand at canoeing and fishing at taster sessions running throughout the day. A display of all the weird and wonderful things found in the canal will also be on show at the event, and visitors will be able to sample the tasty delights made by local food traders.

Keith Bradfield, the Canal & River Trust's supervisor on the Walsall Canal says: "This is a fantastic opportunity for us to give people a rare behind-the-scenes visit to their local canal as they have never seen it before, and probably never will again. The team will all be there on Saturday 23rd September to answer any questions and explain about the works we've done, which would have been almost exactly how it was done 200 years ago."

The bottom gates at lock 5 are nearing the end of their life due to wear and tear and rot. Unusually the gates will be changed while the canal is still full of water, as the surrounding area will not support the huge crane required, and instead a crane boat will be used. Other work to the lock involves inspecting the brick walls and flooring for damage.

The Walsall Canal runs for seven miles from Ryders Green Junction to Walsall Town Wharf. Walsall Town Wharf has undergone major redevelopment in the last decade and has totally transformed the area, which was previously run down and on the verge of being lost forever. It now provides moorings for boaters and access to the town's attractions, including the Leather Museum and the Jerome K Jerome Birthplace Museum.

For nature lovers, walking enthusiasts and cyclists, the canals in Walsall are part of a network of routes connecting the town centre to the surrounding countryside.

The event will be held on Saturday 23rd September, 10am-4pm. No pre-booking is required. Parking is not available for the event however the lock is a short walk along the towpath from the town centre. Access to the towpath is off Birchill's Street. Site post code is WS2 8NG.

To find out about other open days happening go to www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/open-days

For further media interviews or images (including archive photography) please contact:

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Notes to editors:

The Canal & River Trust is the guardian of 2,000 miles of historic waterways across England and Wales, caring for the nation's third largest collection of listed structures, as well as museums, archives, and hundreds of important wildlife sites.

We believe that *living waterways transform places and enrich lives* and our role is to make sure there is always a place on your doorstep where you can escape the pressures of everyday life, stretch your legs and simply feel closer to nature.

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The new lock gates are hand-crafted using traditional methods in the Trust's specialist workshops at Bradley in the West Midlands and Stanley Ferry in Yorkshire. A single lock gate can take up to 20 days to make and has a working life of between 25 and 30 years. In order to be watertight they need to be built very precisely, fitting tightly to the masonry of the lock walls and to each other.

Locks have varying numbers of gates – at the 'upstream' end of locks some have two gates whilst others only have one, with the same applying at the 'downstream' end.

Walsall historical information

Walsall Gasworks were still using canal transport until late into the commercial-carrying age, and tanker specialists Thomas Clayton undertook their last journey from here with a load of crude tar in 1966.

The Anson Branch connected with the Bentley Canal and on to the Wyrley & Essington until it was abandoned in the early 1960s. The Bradley Branch ran from Moorcroft Junction to the Wednesbury Oak Loop until it was also abandoned around the same time. The Gospel Oak and Monway Branches together with various basins and spurs, all long derelict, are an indication of how important the line once was to the economy of the area.

At Tame Valley Junction, the Tame Valley Canal branches off towards Birmingham; the Lower Ocker Hill Branch once serviced the eponymous power station. The Tipton Green & Toll End Communication connected with the main line at Tipton and, until its abandonment in the 1960s, it offered an alternative route from Ryders Green, which tended to become very

busy. At the bottom of Ryder's Green the derelict Danks Branch linked with the Tame Valley while the Haines Branch served brickworks.