

PRESS RELEASE

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ANDERTON BOAT LIFT CELEBRATES RESTORATION 20th ANNIVERSARY

Britain's first boat lift, Anderton Boat Lift, Cheshire's Cathedral of Canals, is preparing to lift off for a year of celebrations to mark the 20th anniversary of its millennium restoration.

Operated by the Canal & River Trust waterways and wellbeing charity, the popular Northwich visitor attraction will be hosting a whole season of events, including winter works open days, a steam fair weekend and 10k run in May, as well as dozens of behind-the-scenes tours and family fun activity days.

The anniversary year opens with two winter works public open days on the weekend of 26 and 27 February 2022, when Trust engineers will shine a light on the constant challenge of keeping the lift in good working order. Visitors will be given unique access and insight into the lift's complex mechanism and be able to see work in progress as the gate seals are replaced on one of the caissons - the giant tanks which transport boats up and down the lift.

Originally constructed in 1875 to connect the Trent & Mersey Canal with the River Weaver Navigation 50 feet below, the lift operated for more than 100 years before it was closed down in 1983 due to safety concerns caused by extensive corrosion.

More than £7 million was raised to fund a major restoration in 2000 and it started operating again on 26 March 2002 to great fanfare, followed by an official opening of the lift and new visitor centre by HRH The Prince of Wales on 28 April 2003. The 20th anniversary of that first boat passage will be marked on Saturday 26 March 2022 with public celebrations on site, and regular boat trips will start again for the summer season on 1 April.

Ani Sutton, destinations and attractions manager with the Trust, said: "Anderton Boat Lift is truly one of the 'wonders of the waterways' and it is brilliant to be marking the 20th anniversary of its restoration and opening as a visitor attraction. Each year the lift attracts thousands of visitors to the area to marvel at the incredible structure and enjoy a trip aboard the Edwin Clark boat, named after the lift's designer.

"For 20 years, this Scheduled Monument has served us well. As people visit us over the anniversary year we hope to share with them news of a major multi-million pound refurbishment which is due to take place in the next two years. The black iron structure needs repainting, the control system

Canal & River Trust

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upgrading and the hydraulic ram cylinders, which support the two caissons, potentially need remedial work.

“We are still awaiting specialist engineering reports. These will help the Trust to assess exactly what needs to be done, in the least obtrusive way. However the long term plan is to start a major upgrade and repair programme, probably in 2023, to ensure the lift continues to be in good condition to welcome boaters and visitors for many decades to come.”

For the latest news and information about events at Anderton Boat Lift, check out the Trust website: www.canalrivertrust.org.uk. Places on the winter works open days in February are free but need to be booked in advance.

History of the Anderton Boat Lift

1875. Anderton Boat Lift was opened in 1875 to connect the Trent & Mersey Canal, and routes to the Potteries, with the River Weaver Navigation, which links into the River Mersey and the Port of Liverpool. It replaced the need for extensive warehousing, three double inclined planes and four salt chutes at Anderton Basin and provided easy passage from one waterway to another without the need to transfer goods between boats.

Hydraulic engineer Edwin Clark was commissioned to design the lift and he created an impressive cast iron frame, encasing two counter balanced caissons, each propelled from below by a giant hydraulic ram or cylinder. However the use of salty river water as a hydraulic fluid caused major corrosion problems and in the 1880s and 90s the lift was out of action on a number of occasions for repairs.

1908. Eventually the Weaver Navigation Trustees decided to replace the hydraulic rams with electric motors and a system of counter weights and overhead pulleys that would allow the caissons to operate independently of one another. Construction work was carried out around the busy boat lift and the new super structure eventually opened in 1908, with the loss of only 49 operating days.

The Boat Lift then continued to operate successfully for another six decades, with the aid of regular repairs and replacement of the wire ropes. Commercial traffic on the waterways declined during the 1950s and 60s, and in 1983 extensive corrosion was uncovered during repainting. The lift was declared structurally unsound and closed.

2002. After consultation with English Heritage, it was decided to restore Anderton Boat Lift to hydraulic operation again, using specialist hydraulic oil. The counter weights were removed and rearranged in the grounds as a maze for visitors to enjoy. The restoration took two years to complete and Anderton Boat Lift re-opened as a visitor attraction on Tuesday 26 March 2002, complete with a new glass-topped trip boat, the Edwin Clark, to offer sight-seeing trips through the lift and along the river. A new visitor centre was then constructed and the whole visitor destination was officially opened the following spring by HRH The Prince of Wales on 28 April 2003.

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Notes to Editors

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

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