



### Chairman's Notes John Tackley

Much of the activity over the past months is already reported elsewhere in this issue by our highly competent and knowledgeable editor and I will certainly not duplicate his labours.

I would, however, like to comment on some aspects of our current activities which I think need further exploration.

First, I wish to entirely refute a suggestion that I am in any way in favour of permanently reducing the river level to minimise the danger of flooding, as one member suggested I might be, after reading my March edition contribution. I am sorry for the misunderstanding.

I was intending to write a further article for this issue dealing with the wider ramifications of **dredging neglect**, but Colin has already done so and saved me the effort. (Page 24, ED)

It is shameful that much of the siltation in the Weaver is caused by the River Dane, which is not under British Waterways control, but by DEFRA, but that British Waterways have to solve the problem, but are denied the funding to tackle the problem satisfactorily.

Meanwhile Northwich continues to live dangerously!

**British Waterways** invited us to an initial meeting to discuss possibilities of development of the old **Floatel site**. The discussions were interesting, and it is hoped that we can make a positive contribution.

It is great to see that B.W. are taking the initiative to try and resuscitate this largely moribund area which, if imaginatively developed, could add such attraction to our town centre.

Colin has also reported on a very successful and exciting full day, "floating presentation," we helped organise with Cheshire West and Chester Regeneration Group to present our Weaver Valley to the **Heritage Lottery Fund** as a likely recipient of HLF grants. It involved using two of our members boats, a great heritage presentation by Colin, support from our committee and some very slick operation by B.W staff and a lot of goodwill to enable us to bring it all together on a tight time scale. We hope to be co-operating with Cheshire West to help create a full scale



irrefutable bid! Watch this space for further developments! (More on page 22)

Finally, thank you all for your support by belonging to our Society. It really is essential that we have the authority and backing of many like minded members when we make our views known. We hope we always speak for the majority of you and if we don't, please tell us. Your committee do believe that we can improve our local environment, but we need a strong remit to have real influence. Ask your friends to join us if you support what we do. It helps to give us the incentive to continue, when positive achievement is difficult when everyone is highlighting their lack of funds. I look forward to seeing a surge of New Members!

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## **The CHAIRMAN'S REPORT at the 2010 AGM held at the Salt Museum in Northwich in March.**

John Tackley said 2009 has been an unusual year, as we have stood and watched the organisations, with whom we primarily wish to deal, all rushing about moving their goalposts. **Cheshire County Council** (who were responsible for the Weaver Valley Initiative in all its various forms,) disappeared together with the skills of many knowledgeable people and, of course, so did **Vale Royal Borough Council**, who were responsible for the Northwich Vision and the Vision for Winsford. I suspect that much of the work and most of the money that has been expended on these ventures will not again see the light of day, as the new officers will not wish to follow similar paths to those that have gone before. We have also seen **British Waterways** take on a massive re-structuring, which had left us unsure, at least until close to the year end, what the new management structure would be and with whom we should negotiate if we wished to progress our own aims. We have also witnessed the last rumblings of the **Mersey Basin Campaign**, which has finally lowered its shutters, which has meant the loss of Ann Bates as the manager of Action Weaver Valley, this being a subsidiary of the Mersey Basin Campaign. Ann achieved a great deal in her ten years of office and we wish her well.

I said earlier that all the goalposts were being moved, but in reality it has



been a case of the very foundations of the organisations that we need to be effective, have been totally rebuilt, the only constants remaining seeming to be the River itself, and our Society. I make these comments as we are, in many respects, a pressure group, and in 2009, there has been no fully functioning group available on which we could exert pressure, as they were, at best restructuring, or, at worst, struggling for survival.

This is a report on our 2009 activities and in view of my previous comments, you will realise that concrete results were difficult to achieve, but as those of you who can recall what I reported in the November Weaver News, we took the opportunity to formalise our aims where we wish to see progress, and now the tumult and the shouting has died and the new associated organisations are in place, we can hopefully pursue these aims in more practical terms in 2010 and we are, in fact, doing so.

I must briefly mention the objectives we have defined in 2009, most of which are ongoing. They can be summarised as follows

i) **Restoration of Riversdale Bridge.**

It seems likely that the new bridge, very similar to the existing structure, but wider to accommodate passing wheelchairs, and, unbelievably, likely to be power operated, will be completed in early autumn.

ii) **Provision of Pontoon Access Moorings at Locks.**

Each Lock now has a floating pontoon mooring at its head and tail, provided to accommodate heavier craft awaiting passage. It is likely that they will also be used as evening moorings after the locks have closed.

iii) **Lock opening hours.**

As the river is now only used for pleasure traffic, we are pressing for adjusted opening hours, more suited for leisure use.

iv) **Re-opening of Frodsham Lock.**

It has been a long-term aim of the Society to restore the navigation to Frodsham and restore the oldest recoverable working lock on the canal. (See article starting page 21

**Fishing in the Weaver - from the archives**

**1907**, October. Lord Delamere complaining about the nuisance caused by fishermen on the towpath opposite Vale Royal, especially on sundays

**1931**, December. Northwich joint anglers paid £10/10/- for the fishing



rights from the banks of the river.

**1938**, June .Application from the 'King and Queen' angling soc from Warrington to fish the Weston canal. Granted at £5 p.a.

**1939**, August. 'King and Queen' angling society. Ask to give up their lease on the Weston canal as the waters were not suitable for fish life! (Have things changed, your views please)  
for more information)

v) **Waterway Connection. River Weaver to Middlewich Branch at Winsford.**

This project is our pipe dream, something all Societies should have. It needs to be talked about, as the benefits to the area would be enormous, and would bring tremendous extra tourist revenue. We do accept, however, that with only restricted funding available, this is for the future, after other ventures have highlighted the need.

vi) **Greater Waterside Access.**

We can only make progress with this activity with the support of the local authority. I think we are entitled to say, at least for 2009, what local authority? Our efforts will continue once we are aware of the new personnel with whom we should deal.

vii) **Dredging and Flood Risk.**

Councillor Andrew Needham, who is very concerned about this problem, is keeping us well informed on this complex issue, as it is at the very core of the problems of waterside development along the valley. Some aspects of this issue are analysed in my article in the latest edition of Weaver News. (See article starting page 24 for more information)

viii) **Brine Pipeline.**

David Roberts has worked hard and assiduously to try and have this brine pipeline re-routed to bring substantial revenue benefits to British Waterways, rather than miscellaneous local landowners. These negotiations are still ongoing. (See article page 21 for more information)

ix) **Sanitary Stations.**

We feel that more facilities should be available on the lower river, to persuade cruising craft to spend more time on the Weaver. Preliminary discussions with British Waterways show that we are in agreement on this, and we are hoping to see a simple pump out facility provided at



Acton Bridge.

x) **Increased River Awareness.**

Colin Edmondson, our Editor and Archivist, gave around 20 talks in 2009, under various headings relating to the River, and does a great job for us in promoting the very special features of our river and its environs. These talks are meticulously prepared and fascinating in content. I can seriously recommend them to all organisations seeking a speaker with specialist knowledge.

xi) **Anderton Boat Lift Mural.**

We made a contribution to the provision of the Boat Lift Mural, which, I think most of you know, is to be unveiled tomorrow. I lived with it, in all its ramifications in 2009, as my wife, Bernice, is the artist. Two of our members, Gordon Diprose and Ron Evans, have spent much of their time helping to organise its unveiling, and I truly believe this Mural will bring greater awareness of the river and the Boat Lift to many tourists, who would perhaps not otherwise have visited the Lift. I must admit to a personal bias, but the interest will become apparent over the ensuing months. British Waterways have been extremely helpful and co-operative in the installation and unveiling. (Article starting on page 9)

xii) **Trip Boat Operation.**

This is a project we must encourage, as it is likely to bring much greater awareness of the considerable attractions of the area, together with staff training opportunities, with comparatively small capital outlay, and a high likelihood of extremely profitable operation.

All these matters have been covered in greater detail in Weaver News, so I only touch upon them here, but it can be seen that there is much worthwhile work to be done, and I appeal to you all to promote our interests to the best of your ability, as numbers mean influence and we need influence to capitalise on the enormous potential this part of Cheshire possesses.

Finally, my thanks must go to my staunchly supportive committee. They all offer their services without stint, despite also occupying responsible

**From the archives**

*1906 the use of pleasure craft on the river is not new. In 1905 there was concern about the increasing use of petrol launchers on the river and their potential fire risk in locks.*

We have much worthwhile work to do. How effective we are depends upon the pressure and enthusiasm we can muster to awaken our aims in others. A stronger committee would enable us to achieve more - How about joining us? It can be fun!



## WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT by the DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS (DEFRA)

Date 21 June 2010

Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Natural Environment and Fisheries  
(Richard Benyon)

I am pleased to be appointed as Waterways Minister as I am familiar with the public benefits the waterways provide and I am making this statement to set out how I intend to take forward inland waterways policy for England and Wales. The Government considers civil society has a very valuable role to play in delivering public services as part of our commitment to creating a Big Society. We will therefore be continuing to look in detail at whether a third sector model would be appropriate for British Waterways, including the possible inclusion of the Environment Agency's navigations as the other navigation authority grant aided by Government. My department will be engaging a wide range of stakeholders in this work (and liaising with the Scottish Government). However I must make clear that, given the Government's overriding objective of reducing the financial deficit, no decisions on such a change will be taken until after the forthcoming Spending Review. In the light of this I have also decided not to proceed now with a new Government waterways strategy and I will review the situation following the Spending Review.

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### **British Waterways Spring User Forum.**

John Tackley and Colin Edmondson attended this twice yearly user group meeting on behalf of the society. As the River Weaver is now part of the North Wales and Borders area, the meeting took place in Whitchurch. The usual format was followed, with a presentation by BW, supper, followed by splitting into discussion groups for the various waterways. Topics relevant to the Weaver were as follows;

**Riversdale swing bridge** over the old river course at Hunts locks should be open in September. There are concerns about possible anti-social



behaviour once the bridge re-opens, the situation will be monitored. The North West Development Agency have made a grant to enable a full survey to be made of Sutton Weaver swing bridge, with a view to starting work in the near future. This will be a joint scheme between BW and Cheshire West and Chester, and the local Parish Councils. A press release will be available soon.

## Vale Royal

The swing bridge over the recently repaired lock has been found to be in a worse condition than was previously thought, and decisions now have to be made as to the costs of repair or replacement. Temporary repairs should allow it to continue in static use for this year, replacement if necessary will take place over the 2010/11 stoppage season.

**Floating pennywort** has been almost completely eradicated. The programme of yearly spraying, at a cost of some £60-70,000 a year, has brought this problem under control.

The reinstatement of a connection from **Hayhurst bridge** in Northwich to the **towpath** along the river is still in discussion. The land is owned by the developer, not BW, so more discussion is necessary. The operating hours of the lock keepers on the river will not change in the immediate future.

Due to funding constraints the plans to reinstate the **barge locks** at Dutton and Saltersford are no longer on the programme. Requests to extend the **visitor moorings at Acton Bridge** have led to a promise to undertake a site inspection.

Restoration of the **visitor moorings at Anderton**, half of which are now fenced off and unsafe, looks unlikely. The land is owned by CWAC, who are as short of funding as BW.

The site of the recently removed '**Floatel**' in Northwich is planned to become additional mooring space as part of the 'Vision for Northwich' development.



## Volunteers Needed - Working Party

Following our successful paint job at Vale Royal Locks in March we wish to set up a regular support group to work with British Waterways on the Weaver. If you are interested please contact: Jim Mole on 01606 40955 or 16-elizabethan@tiscali.co.uk

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## Happenings at the Anderton Boat Lift

In the middle of March the **Trent & Mersey Canal Society** unveiled a seat alongside the lift in commemoration of the late **Christine Thompson**, one of the tireless campaigners for the restoration of the lift, who probably did more than any other person to raise awareness and make it happen.



*Seen here at the unveiling are Malcolm Turner, Chairman of the T&M on the left, and Ted Thompson, Christine's husband, on the right.*



A few days later the sections of the **mural** painted by **Diana Tackley**, wife of our Chairman, were carefully moved from the studio at Barnton and erected at Anderton by Chris and Steve of Sign-UK, assisted by Colin Edmondson. Things went smoothly and according to plan, and although we stopped for a moment as the fourth panel went into place to admire it, as this was the first time that more than 3 panels had been able to be put together, the job was finished by the time darkness fell. (In time for a welcome pint at the **Stanley Arms** supplied by Bernice, cheers!)



*Colonel Saner starts his journey to the Anderton Lift, thanks to Chris (left) and Steve (right), of Sign-UK in Oldham, who provided the panels and erected them at Anderton*

*Once at Anderton Colonel Saner is slid carefully into place onto the aluminium rails fixed to the concrete wall.*



**From the archives**

**1905 January** "Health and Safety regulations coming into force. Work needed on lighting, fencing etc."



On the 26th of March we were back at Anderton yet again, this time for the official unveiling of the mural. British Waterways staff in the meantime had helpfully worked out a way of covering the mural to hide it from public view in such a way that the sheet could be quickly removed for the unveiling ceremony. The weather was kind, and a large crowd gathered, including the local press and representatives from all the organisations responsible for the restoration of the lift. Speeches were given and the ropes released by Francis Done, and there was a sigh as the work of art was revealed in all its glory. It strikes you straight away just how BIG it is, over 30 feet by 8 feet.



**WOW!**

*Just a part of Bernice's extensive and varied exhibition. John Tackley is checking that everything is running to plan.*



In the top left of the mural is a representation of the transport of a petition to No.10 Downing Street by water, the late Christine Thompson can be seen handing over the petition. Below can be seen typical narrow boats waiting to use the lift. In the centre, left to right, are Edward Leader Williams, Engineer to the Weaver Navigation at the time that the lift was built, Edwin Clark, M. Inst. C.E., hydraulics expert and designer of the lift, and Colonel John A. Saner, Engineer to the Weaver at the time of the rebuild of the lift in 1908. To the top right is a picture of the Friends of the Anderton Boat Lift visitor centre, in a container on what is now the car park. This was manned every day except Christmas day by volunteers. Bottom right are two of the larger craft used on the river in the days of salt carrying.

Following the unveiling we partook of a spread put on for us by the staff at the lift, and admired a display of Bernice's artwork, which was on exhibition for the following fortnight.



*After the unveiling Bernice (centre) stands with (left to right) Tim Turner, manager of the Boat Lift, Wendy Capelle, Manager of BW Wales and Borders, Julie Sharman, previously Northwest manager and now head of Regeneration for BW, and Michelle Kozomara, BW Publicity Officer.*



## Two sculptures linking Anderton Nature Park with Anderton Boat Lift were officially unveiled on the 24th of May.

The idea to link the two places came from Cheshire West and Chester Council's Countryside Ranger Dave James, who is based at the park. Local artists Tracey Cartledge and Karen Allerton worked with Year 6 pupils from Comberbach Primary School and two columns were created, highlighting the history of the area.

The creation took shape after the children visited the Anderton Boat Lift, undertook a river trip supported by British Waterways and also went along to the Salt Museum to explore the local impact of salt mining in the area.

Mandy Kelly, acting Headteacher of Comberbach Primary School, said: "The project was an enjoyable, stimulating way for our children to discover and appreciate their local history."

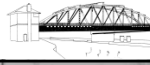
"It has given the school a wonderful opportunity to work with the local greenspace ranger and a rare opportunity to work with professional artists, developing skills beyond the classroom, all made possible by the generosity of INEOS Enterprise."

Added Janet Ward, INEOS Enterprises: "It's always a pleasure to support projects at Anderton and Marbury as all the partners work so well together and every project is delivered to a fantastic standard."

( Source; [www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/news\\_and\\_events](http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/news_and_events).)

### From the archives

**1906 January.** *"suggest regulations needed to control the increasing number of petrol launches on the river"*



*Left; The sculptures seen on the day they were installed.*

*Below; Officially unveiling the sculptures are Janet Ward from INEOS Enterprises with Councillor Richard Short, Executive Member for Culture and Recreation and pupils from Comberbach Primary School*





## Vale Royal locks bridge

Although works to restore Vale Royal small locks were completed at the beginning of the year, boats have not been able to use the lock because of concerns about the condition of the swing bridge across the lock chamber. This has to be swung each time the lock is used, and the steelwork below the bridge decking and supporting the 'kentledge', the ballast weights, was known to be heavily corroded. Funding was not available to do any work on the bridge concurrently with the works on the lock. John Tackley and Colin Edmondson were invited to be present when the BW engineering team gathered to attempt to swing the bridge and assess its condition. To prevent any possibility of the bridge taking a nosedive into the chamber, a floating crane was brought in and used to support the nose end of the bridge. The operating windlass being very stiff, the bridge was opened using a 'Tirfor' winch attached to a bollard. Despite the removal of some of the kentledge beforehand to reduce the weight, the steelwork surrounding it gave up when the bridge



*In this photo of the bridge pit the 'kentledge', or ballast weights, can be seen after the failure of the supporting steelwork.*



was half swung and it dropped into the bridge pit. Close inspection revealed that the steelwork was in a worse condition than originally thought, but that with temporary repairs it could still serve as a fixed bridge for the rest of the year, with a view to making a complete repair or replacement in the 2010/11 stoppage season. Thanks are due to Steve O'Sullivan for asking us to be there and to take photographs.



*The bridge was opened whilst being supported by a floating crane*

### **Fishing in the Weaver - from the archives**

**1907**, October. Lord Delamere complaining about the nuisance caused by fishermen on the towpath opposite Vale Royal, especially on sundays

**1931**, December. Northwich joint anglers paid £10/10/- for the fishing rights from the banks of the river.

**1938**, June .Application from the 'King and Queen' angling soc from Warrington to fish the Weston canal. Granted at £5 p.a.

**1939**, August. 'King and Queen' angling society. Ask to give up their lease on the Weston canal as the waters were not suitable for fish life!  
(Have things changed, your views please)



## **Sutton Weaver Swing bridge**

A press release taken from [Waterscape.com](http://Waterscape.com)



British Waterways and Cheshire West & Chester are studying a range of options to secure the long term future of Sutton Weaver Swing Bridge, a vital transport link across the River Weaver.

The bridge was constructed in the 1920s. It now requires a major overhaul to future proof it against increasing volumes of traffic using the A56 trunk route, in addition to maintaining the navigation through the continued provision of a swinging bridge.

A project team of engineers and planners is now investigating a range of technical solutions and costings, with the short and long term impacts of the project being assessed. Only when all the options have been evaluated will the most suitable option be agreed. Councillors from Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council, Frodsham Town Council, Helsby Parish Council and Sutton Weaver Parish Council have met representatives from Cheshire West & Chester Council and British Waterways to discuss possible future plans for the bridge.

Communities will be kept informed of progress via a liaison group



incorporating senior members of BW and CW&C along with representatives from the neighbouring parish, town and borough councils. This will allow residents and local users to keep abreast of future developments through their community forums.

British Waterways says the bridge is structurally sound and operating well within its capacity. However, Principal Waterway Engineer for North Wales & Borders Joe Murphy said maintenance issues regarding the deck plates are believed to be contributing to the decay of the road surface. “We are also mindful about community concern over the bridge’s appearance and are looking into the possibility of addressing this as part of the project,” he added.

Richard Nickson, Cheshire West and Chester Council’s Senior Manager for Highways Network Strategy said: “We’re looking forward to working with a range of partners to secure the future of the Sutton Weaver Swing Bridge. The solution we choose will balance the best use of the budget available as well as traffic management issues to ensure that we minimise disruption during the work.”

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## **Dutton Upper Towpath Bridge**

Thanks to Paul Brown, BW Construction manager, for letting us know that construction works are due to get underway on reconstructing the New Dutton Upper Horse Bridge towards the middle of August.





## Spitting incidents at Hunts Lock.

Those of us that go boating know that being spat on from a great height is a constant hazard, particularly under bridges in towns, but it is not a frequent occurrence on our beloved River Weaver. Narrow Boat 'Epiphany' reported the incident on their web site blog (<http://nbepiphany.co.uk>), but fortunately in this case the culprits were molluscs! These little devils spit out streams of water as the lock empties, sometimes for a considerable distance. Be warned, keep a cover over your cup of tea and plate of butties! (<http://nbepiphany.co.uk>)



*Hunts locks seen from the railway viaduct.*

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## And rather more worrying, intimidation at Saltersford.

There have been quite a few incidents during the hot weather, with youths swimming in the river at both Hunts and Saltersford. This is now a health and safety issue and the navigation has to be closed until they are removed, which involves bringing in the Police. This has led to unpleasant incidents of abusive and indecent behaviour towards residents, boaters and BW staff alike.

A meeting was held in Barnton on the 15th July between the Parish Council, residents, BW and the Police to look towards a solution to the problem. The Police have been supplied with a copy of the bye-laws of the river, which prohibit swimming.



## James Jackson Grundy is alive and well.

Some good news here, as Mersey Tanker Lighterage have decided to use the JJG on the grain run to the wharf at Frodsham, which is normally done by their barge 'PANARY'. She cannot carry a full load of 285 tons yet, as the channel depths in the Weaver mouth will not allow it, but she can manage 230 tons at the moment. Unloading at Frodsham is somewhat time consuming, as the suction equipment has been vandalised and a crane equipped with a clamshell bucket has had to be used instead, a real timewarp! The grain then continues its journey to Manchester by lorry.



*These photos, supplied by Paul Kirkbride, show her out in the River Mersey on the 21st April, she looks a treat sitting well down in the water.*



*The other photos were taken by Colin Edmondson, and show at Frodsham wharf and during unloading by crane.*



## **Riversdale Bridge and the Salt Museum**

Work is under way on the new bridge, with the approaches piled and construction of the foundations well advanced.



The old bridge has been removed and the centre section of it now has a new home in the grounds of the Salt Museum, which has now been re-branded as Weaver Hall Museum and Workhouse. The bridge section will be cleaned up and an interpretation board will be installed soon.



*John Tackley and Colin Edmondson with museum Curator Matt Wheeler (the smart one of the three!)*





*The new bridge will be of similar appearance to the old one, but will be wider and will meet all modern requirements.*

The Weaver gallery in the museum has now closed, but some of the exhibits are still on show in the new transport gallery. Salt related topics will move to the Lion Salt Works when restoration is finished, hopefully within the next 3 years.

**From the archives.**

**1888 July** *“petition for swing footbridge at Hunts to replace path across Hartford locks, now removed.”*

**1888 October** *“Hunts old course, new bridge completed and in use by passengers.”*

**King Street Energy Brine Pipeline project.**

This is a project to provide very large underground caverns for gas storage, and involves bringing seawater from Tranmere across country to just South of Northwich. This is then pumped underground in a very controlled manner, where it will dissolve the rock salt to produce the caverns. The resulting concentrated brine, far in excess of what can be used by local industry, is returned to the River Mersey at Tranmere. Committee member David Roberts suggested changing the route of the pipes to follow the shore of the Mersey, the Manchester Ship Canal and the bed of the River Weaver, simplifying the construction, reducing the number of landowners affected and hopefully bringing in a rental for BW. To this end a meeting was arranged at BW's Navigation Road offices with NPL Estates, responsible for delivering the project, BW officials and representatives from this society. NPL explained that our proposed



route had been explored by them at an earlier date, but the problems of potential release of contamination held in the silt made it too risky on environmental grounds. We continued to talk about their other land holdings on the river, mainly at Wallerscote and Frodsham. NPL are well known for working with the local community, and trying to put something back into the community in conjunction with their projects. They expressed an interest in our wishes to reopen the Frodsham cut and lock, and also in our suggestion that scrap steelwork from the demolition of Wallerscote works could be taken away by boat to the scrap steel export wharf at Seaforth and Wallerscote wharf maintained as the possible calling point for a future trip boat. Any potential source of external funding which would help to improve facilities on the river would be very welcome.

NPL Estates specialise in purchasing brownfield sites and reclaiming them ready for redevelopment. More about the company can be found at [www.nplestates.com](http://www.nplestates.com), and details of the King Street Gas Storage scheme at;

[www.nplwastemanagement.com/NPLGroup/KingStreetEnergy](http://www.nplwastemanagement.com/NPLGroup/KingStreetEnergy)

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## **“Saltscape” Meeting and site visit**

by Steve Clarke and Colin Edmondson.

On Tuesday 6th July two officers from the Heritage Lottery Fund met representatives of local organisations to discuss an exciting new project in the Weaver Valley aimed at restoring and enhancing the natural and historic landscape and making it more accessible to local people.

The project, called **“Saltscape”** is being led by Cheshire West and Chester Council and will form a bid to the HLF’s Landscape Partnership Scheme next February. At the suggestion of our committee, the visit took the form of a boat trip from the Lion Salt Works to Anderton along the canal, with commentary from Colin Edmondson about salt mining and subsidence, and from Northwich Woodlands about their reclamation of previously derelict land. After a meeting with Wendy Capelle and others from BW in the cafe we re-embarked on the boats and went up the Weaver Navigation to above Hunts Locks for a visit to Weaver hall Museum and lunch next door. Back on the boats we then went as far as Vale Royal Locks, finishing with a walk down the towpath to Newbridge, to show how this was one of the missing links in the many towpath



improvement works that have already been carried out.

Organisations represented included CWAC, the River Weaver Navigation Society, The Mersey Forest and the Woodland Trust. The visitors were suitably impressed by the distinctive and varied Weaver landscape and look forward to receiving the application in due course.

*“In the meantime we have a lot of work to do pulling it all together”* said Steve Clarke who is leading the bid for CWAC.

Our thanks to our Secretary Jim Mole and new member John McCall who allowed us to use their boats on both the canal and the river, we believe that seeing the area from the water allowed us to show the HLF just how much had changed over the years, how the towpaths could make well surfaced, level access routes and how trip boats could open up the area to a much wider audience.

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## **Have your say in the development of Northwich town centre.**

On Friday and Saturday 16th and 17th July a team from Gillespies had a display/consultation wagon on Baron's Quay car park. If you missed it, some of the survey questions were printed on a returnable post card. There may be some of these in the Information Centre in Northwich, or you can download the questions at;

[www.vren.btik.com/documents/1518669016.ikml](http://www.vren.btik.com/documents/1518669016.ikml) .

Go to the bottom of the page and download the document , 'What do you think about the strategy for Northwich Town Centre', fill it in and post it off to Wyvern House before 31st July. Simple!

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## **Small scale Hydropower.**

Two small archimedian screw power stations have been given the go ahead in Stockport. Together they will generate over 500MWh/yr, enough to power about 120 houses. Will we see something like this on the Weaver in years to come? For the background to the story type [www.h2ope.org.uk](http://www.h2ope.org.uk) into your browser and click on the 'current projects' button. h2oPE is a Social Enterprise whose aim is to set up small-scale hydropower projects that benefit both the environment and local communities.



## **Flooding risks in Northwich**

You may remember in the last issue that our Chairman John Tackley touched on this subject. There has been a lot of heated debate since, which need not concern us in detail. One of John's comments related to the lowering of water levels in advance of anticipated flood water in order to provide a reservoir to help accommodate the expected waters. That this was done historically is proved by this reference from the Engineer's report to the Weaver Trustees dated November 1890 "*Immediately on receiving telegrams from the outlying gauging stations the levels are drawn down to accommodate the flood waters.*" (With thanks to the Waterways Trust Archives at Gloucester).

I have recently been made aware of a consultant's report which states that the recent lack of dredging of the River Weaver below Town bridge in Northwich will have no effect on the ability of the river to release flood water. This is misleading, as I hope the following will explain. I would like to point out before going any further that this is not intended to be a dig at British Waterways, their funds are being cut year by year and it is all they can do to maintain sufficient depth for navigational purposes, and sometimes they struggle to provide even that.

### **Why does the river silt up?**

I will first endeavour to explain why this part of the river has always suffered from siltation. The River Dane is a fast flowing river which carries a lot of sand in suspension. It joins the River Weaver just upstream of Town Bridge, a constriction in the river which keeps the water flowing relatively fast. Once through the bridge the river starts to widen, and the water slows down, at which point its ability to carry the sand diminishes and the sand starts to sink to the bed of the river. This builds up a hard sandbank on the river bed, which only dredging can remove. According to the monthly Engineer's reports of the late 1800's and early 1900's, a dredger was almost permanently stationed at this point during the winter to keep the river dredged to the 12 feet depth required for commercial traffic. The laden draught of boats frequently had to be reduced until the sand could be removed. It is worth noting that historically it was normal for



150,000 tons of dredging to be done each year for maintenance purposes alone.

## **River flow rates**

To move a given volume of water through a certain cross section of a river channel the water has to travel at a certain speed. To move twice the volume requires twice the water speed if the level is to remain the same. The depth of the river between sluices is not necessarily important, what is important is the cross sectional area. At the same speed of flow a wide shallow river can handle a similar volume as a narrow deep one if the cross sectional area is the same, the problems occur when you get narrows and shallows together, as now happens below Northwich. Where the channel is constricted, e.g. by narrows or lack of dredging, then a higher water speed will be required to move the same volume of water as compared to the wider parts either side. To provide this movement requires a gradient in the river, i.e. water upstream at a higher level trying to get to a lower level. The greater the resistance to the flow, the higher the water level that will be required to push the same volume of water through the constriction, and the higher the water level will be upstream of the constriction, i.e. in Northwich.

## **Sluice gates versus weirs for handling flood water**

The water levels of the pounds on the River Weaver during flood conditions are controlled by raising and lowering sluice gates, rather than by the fixed weirs alongside them. I have a copy of an 1870's report by the eminent consulting Engineer of the period, John Hawkshaw, which discusses the relative merits of weirs versus sluices. It states that the discharge of water over a dam or weir requires the water level to rise first (and a hump on the bottom of a river bed could be seen to be a submerged dam), a further rise being necessary before the flow rate can increase. A sluice gate, however, is lifted from the bottom of the river bed thus releasing large volumes of water without any rise in river levels being necessary. This was the method chosen for the Weaver in order to best control water levels, as sluice gates could be lifted to lower water levels in advance of flood water arriving, lifted further to discharge flood



water, often without any rise in water levels, and once the flood water had been dealt with the sluice gates could be dropped, instantly slowing down the water and restoring the river to boat traffic.

The Cheshire West and Chester documents relating to flood risk in Northwich make the statement about existing flood risk management; “British Waterways operate the sluice gates along the Weaver Navigation during flood events which provide some flood risk protection but only for the smaller flood events (the gates were designed for navigational purposes)”. Whoever made this statement was not privy to the background research that I have done over the last 10 years. I can state with certainty that the sluice gates were not designed solely for navigational purposes, but were designed very much with flood conditions in mind. The sluice gates at Dutton, for instance, are of the same cross sectional area as the widest parts of the river upstream or downstream and are therefore able to pass any volume of water that can



*Dutton sluices, which were state of the art at the time of their construction in 1881.*

pass down the river channel.

They can pass far more water than a fixed weir, and are not, therefore, the major restriction to flow. Once a flood condition rises above a certain volume and overflows the river channel, as it did in February 1946, there is no point in having any extra sluice gates as the water has nowhere to go except to spread out sideways. Water will only flow where a gradient exists, otherwise it becomes static.

The sluice gates on the River Weaver were state of the art when built,



based upon the best scientific calculation available at the time, and almost all have since been fully automated for remote operation. Provided that sufficient funds can be found for maintenance including dredging, funds which I believe at the moment are provided solely by BW, there is little that can be done to improve them. The cross sectional area of the flood gates was matched to the cross sectional area of the adjacent river, such that they can handle as much water as the river can take. More information can be found by 'googling' Northwich Flood Risk, which will take you to both Cheshire West and Environment Agency web sites. Detailed reports from Consultants Faber Maunsell can be downloaded from the Cheshire West web site.

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## **Web site wanderings**

You will need to go on line to check out the following, I am afraid that technology does not yet allow you to simply point your mouse at this page and click.

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Marshall's Arm at Hartford has a website up and running ; [www.marshallsarm.org.uk](http://www.marshallsarm.org.uk). You'll find information about the local nature reserve, along with a table of their forthcoming events. More is planned. Reporting on the Marshall's Arm Pond Dipping and Video Microscope event, "Using Chantelle Edwards's excellent equipment, Virginia Hunt's organisation and a team of young pond-dippers. We've seen hearts beating in snail eggs, blood flowing in newtlet gills, 'eyes' on an aquatic flatworm, and the moth caterpillar that mines horse chestnut leaves - it looks like a concertina".

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Another website about the River Weaver has come to my attention, and it is well worth having a look at. The introduction alone makes them a friend of the RWNS, "The River Weaver navigation is a hidden gem and in my opinion is one of the most under rated sections of the network". The address is ;<http://weaver.britainwaterways.co.uk> . A section about the geological history of the stones used in the construction of the large locks at Hunts and vale Royal will be of particular interest to the geologists amongst us.



## Acton Bridge and the smelly interlude!

It will take a bit of careful copying, but can I recommend having a look at John Birchall's web site about the area now used by the Acton Bridge boat club and the businesses that were based here, a cotton mill, an iron forge, zinc rolling mills, bone grinding for fertiliser, animal waste processing (smelly!), and even a gunpowder works. He has a family history link, and has done extensive research. His site is; [www.themeister.co.uk/johnpbirchall/weaver\\_refining.htm](http://www.themeister.co.uk/johnpbirchall/weaver_refining.htm)

With his permission I will quote a little from his web site, for instance this report about the Weaver Refining Works, which sounds rather posh but was actually a blight on the neighbourhood. *"In 1882 an Alkali Inspector described a general scene at the works - 'the manure is made from carcasses, shoddy, leather, slaughter house refuse and some mineral phosphate. The method is to heap twenty to thirty tones of shoddy in a shed, onto this is poured blood and refuse. Any carcasses that the owner may buy are, after being skinned, buried in the heap, the heap is allowed to stand and rot for five or six months. This is then shovelled into a mixer with some leather, crushed bones and acid. After mixing this is let into an open den and a man shovels onto it a certain quantity of mineral phosphate. The stench is simply intolerable.'"*

Not a pleasant thought, and the making of saltpetre was just as smelly. Again I quote from John's web site, *"Saltpetre manufacture was a filthy process, the potassium nitrate came from the drainings of decomposing organic material, dung heaps! Ammonia from the decomposition of urea produced the nitrate by bacterial oxidation. Nitre beds were prepared by mixing manure with potash and straw to give some porosity to the pile. Under cover from the rain, moistened with urine and turned regularly to accelerate the decomposition, the festering could last a year before the heap was leached with water."*

I wonder what the effect of this lot draining into the Weaver had on the river! Acton Bridge Boat Club now occupy the site of the forge and manure works, the above now explains the large number of horseshoes found around the site, and the saltpetre works was a little further upstream in the vicinity of the Riverside Inn. They had only just got going when Dynamite was invented and production became uneconomic.