



The Stratford-upon-Avon Canal Society

NEWSLETTER

www.stratfordcanalsociety.org.uk



Autumn 2009

Issue 344

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The Stratford-upon-Avon Canal Society

The objects of the Society are to promote the fullest use, maintenance and improvement of all Inland Waterways of Great Britain, and in particular the Stratford upon Avon Canal

Stratford upon Avon Canal Society meetings are usually held on the third Friday of each month from September/October to April at 7.45pm.

We meet at Wootton Wawen Village Hall which is situated in the village of Wootton Wawen, very near to the A3400. All are welcome. Admission to meetings is charged at £2 per person. This also covers tea/coffee etc.

From the south, leave Stratford on the A3400, pass under the aqueduct at Wootton, past the village store on the left and then the road takes a 90-degree turn towards Henley in Arden. At the apex of the bend, turn left onto the B4089 towards Aston Cantlow/Alcester. On the corner you will see the Bulls Head pub and the entrance to the village hall is 100 yards from the junction, opposite the pub car park.

From the north, leave Henley in Arden on the A3400. As you approach Wootton Wawen, the road goes down a slight hill and then takes a 90-degree turn to the left. On the apex of the bend, turn right and follow the instructions as above.

Join the Society - Membership rates are now £10

for any number of members living at the same address, per year.

Send a cheque (payable to 'Stratford-upon-Avon Canal Society' together with your name and address to the Membership Secretary (details inside back cover).

Newsletter No. 344 Autumn 2009

The Committee and Society may not agree with the opinions expressed in this Newsletter; we encourage the publication as a matter of interest. Nothing printed herein can be construed as policy or an official announcement unless it is so stated. The Society and Committee accept no liability whatsoever for any matter in the Newsletter.

Final copy date for issue 345 is 15th November 2009 please.

Small Ads, for sale or wanted, are welcome. Send details to Clive Henderson. (inside back cover)

Front cover: Boats at the Stratford River Festival 2009. Photo: Dusty Miller

The Stratford-upon-Avon Canal Society

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Steve turns the tables on Dusty this month and asks him the questions.....

S. Again this has to be the first question. What first captured your interest in waterways?

D. I was always fascinated with water, as a small child I would always end up in it. For instance on a trip to Wimbledon Common (years before the Wombles were discovered) I tried to paddle out on a log. My Mother had to use the last of the scarce clothes coupons to get dry clothes for the journey home.

I started canoeing on the River Wey with scouts. I suppose scouting was responsible for it all as we decided not to go climbing or pot holing but to hire a converted ex working boat from the Wyvern Shipping Company. From that time on I was hooked. Of course in those days about the only craft you saw were the fleets of BW and Willow Wren so I grew to respect the boat people and their way of life.

S. What brought you to the Stratford Canal?

D. Well after buying a house on the derelict Basingstoke canal and running illicit working parties I sold up and bought a pair of boats from which to run a canal art centre at Penkridge in Staffordshire. I then moved to the cottage at lock40 on the Wilmcote flight and then managed a local hire fleet and boat builders.

S. Other than SonACS. how else are you involved in the waterway scene?

D. I'm currently the chairman of the Guild of Waterway Artists. I'm also chairman of the Stratford Narrowboat Trust, a local charity that provides affordable weekends and holidays for youth groups.

S. If you were in charge of BW what would be your aims and priorities?

D. Not being a high flying businessman I probably look at things in a rather simplistic way.

Firstly I'd stop selling off the crown jewels to make a quick buck for short term results.

I'd endeavour to have the whole waterway system adopted as a 2000 mile National Park owned by the Nation for the benefit of the Nation with sufficient funding from government and from local authorities. I'd bring back the skills to the local man in the field, allow him to use these skills, give him back responsibility and a pride in the job. And get rid of all this red tape that increases the cost of even the simplest of jobs.

S. What are the changes do you notice while cruising aboard Foreward do you notice most?

D. The biggest change must be the condition of the towpath -they used to be almost impassable and I remember the North Stratford being non-existent, although it does annoy me when the lycra brigade have passed without a care for other users

I also get rather upset when many of the newer boaters have no regard for the history of the waterways- all some want is a stretch of water to float their boat! Shame really as they're missing so much.

S. Which is your favourite waterway and why?

D. Now that's a difficult one. So many canals have such different things to offer.

The solitude of the Oxford summit. The spectacular scenery above Trevor on the Welsh Canal. The intense industry (sadly disappearing) in the Black Country canals and of course the Stratford with it's unique architecture that has everything- a tunnel, aqueducts, split bridges and barrel roofed cottages.

S. What future role do you see waterway societies and SonACS in particular?

D. With all the Health and Safety, Mission Statements, and environmental evaluations that rule our every breath nowadays it's difficult to see that societies can take much practical part as we did 20 years ago. But we can be both a helpful and informative group forwarding information to BW as to condition of structures, over growth and waterside developments. I think it also important that societies do not lose their value as a campaigning force as who knows what hair brained schemes this or subsequent governments or BW may come up with?

2009/10 Programme of Events

18th September 2009

NOTE MEETING HAS BEEN CANCELLED *

16th October 2009

"They Come Covered in Chocolate....." - Peter Kelly

20th November 2009

Restoration of the Cotswold Canals - Liz Payne

11th December 2009

Christmas Party

15th January 2010

The Saltisford Arm - Joan Driver

19th February 2010

Bridge Chapels - Ken Turner

19th March 2010

AGM

16th April 2010

Pictures from his Collection - Bob May

***Owing to logistical problems the proposed meeting at the Birthplace Trust is not possible and at short notice it has not been possible to arrange an alternative.**

Unless otherwise stated, there is a £2 admission charge to SONACS Wootton Wawen meetings. This includes tea/coffee etc.

Message from the Chairman

The Stratford River Festival was a great success. We put up our mini marquee in a pleasant spot near the River, arranged the presentation boards and laid out merchandising and a selection of second-hand books supplied by Dorothy and Jeremy. Clearly our formula was good because we attracted a large number of visitors over the weekend and encouraged some new members to join. Book sales were brisk and we were able to cover the cost of the pitch. My thanks go to all those members who took time to visit us and those who manned the stall. Thanks also to others who brought along their old books. The weather was good and I feel we were able to show a very positive public face of the Society.



A fortnight later our "Roadshow" arrived at Earlwood for their boat gathering and again we set up camp and took time to explain what SonACS is all about.

Spare a thought for David and Mary Litchfield who took the trouble to bring their full length (and full 7ft width) narrowboat to Stratford and found themselves firmly wedged in bridge 58. This is one of our well known split bridges but is

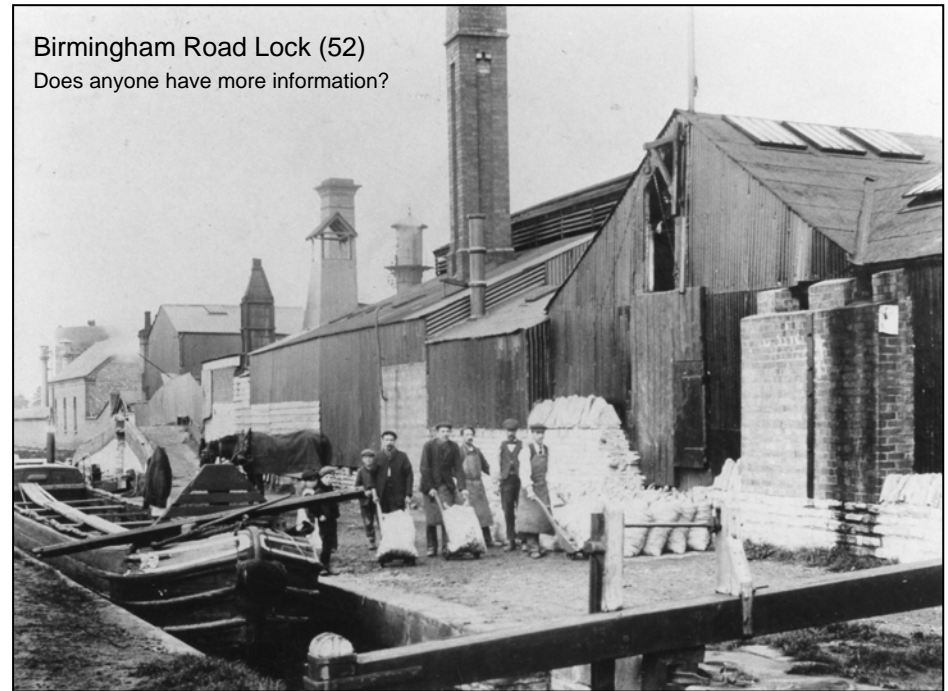


notoriously narrow. The bridge halves have moved so much there is no longer a split. In a very tactful letter David has asked for action from BW who have responded by claiming the max recommended boat width on the Stratford is 6ft10in. Bradshaw's (1904) disagrees and says it is 7ft and, sorry BW, I'm firmly with Bradshaw. This highlights a division between those who run our canals and those who use them. There are many examples of split bridges and as this bridge is little used; it could

probably be removed and the ironwork re-erected as an exhibit in a canal museum. However, I'm told it is Grade II listed and removal would "chip away" at our already depleted canal heritage. We now have a navigation restriction and negative publicity which will deter boaters like David & Mary who will not risk boating on our canal in future. Mindful of BW cash shortages, do you think Bridge 58 should be repaired, removed or left alone?

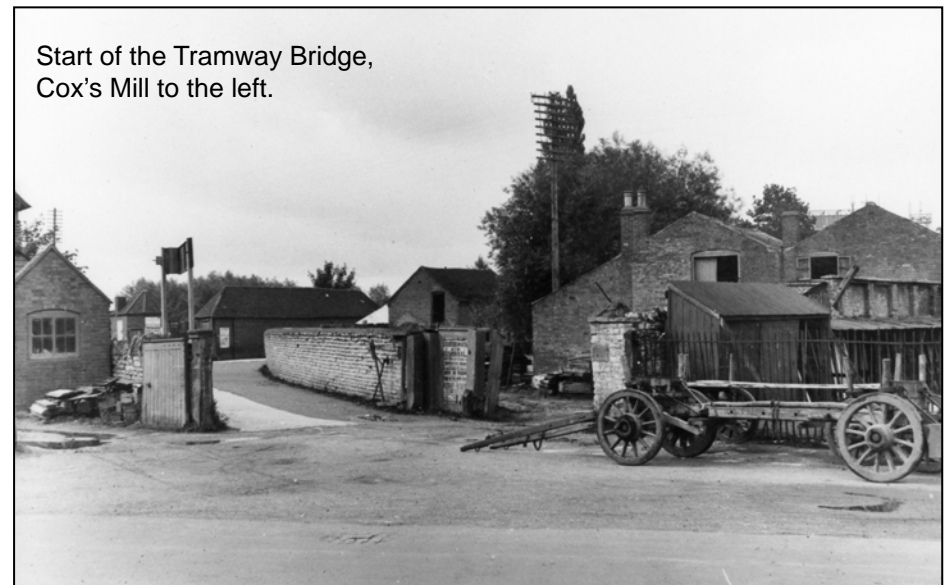
Please drop me a line or send me an email as I would like to hear your views and I will lobby on your behalf.

Steve



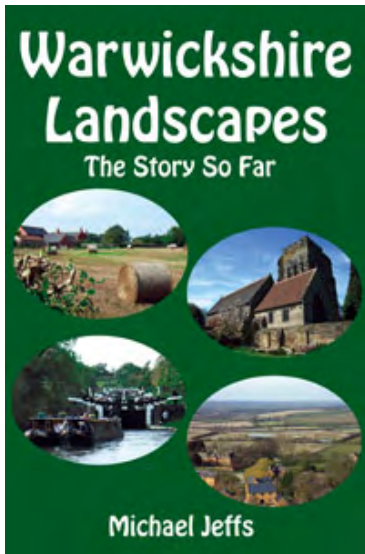
Birmingham Road Lock (52)
Does anyone have more information?

From the Archives



Start of the Tramway Bridge,
Cox's Mill to the left.

Our Member Mick Jeffs, who so ably maintains the Society web site, has written a book which will be of interest to members who live in Warwickshire



I am pleased to announce the publication of my new book. It is a history of the countryside of Warwickshire since geological times. It is a 224 page softback with 76 colour photos and 13 maps. It is 23.4 x 15.6 cm.

If you would like a copy the cover price is £16.99 but as an introductory offer it is £16.99 with free delivery until the end of August.

Visit www.shaybooks.co.uk to pay securely on line and for more information. Otherwise you can send a cheque payable to: M.Jeffs to 2 Belmont Drive, Leamington Spa, CV32 6LS. (Tel: 01926 337195) email: orders@shaybooks.co.uk Do remember to give me your name and address. If you wish to collect a copy the price is £15.00

A proportion of any profits will go to the Warwickshire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England and WaterAid.

New Members

We would like to welcome the following new members.

Ian and Pam Fletcher of Long Itchington

Brian Jarrett of NB Kyle

Ian and Carol Kay of Knowle

Robin Sankey of Stratford

Editor's Report

You will read elsewhere in this issue about the successful Stratford River Festival. Maybe next year it will be a River and Canal Festival!! Following a 24 hour stoppage on the return journey I contacted Tony Harvey, who until November is our Midland area Manager. Below are copies of my letter to him and his reply shown overleaf.



10 August 2009

Dear Tony,

Would you please convey my sincere thanks to Ian Trevor.

Returning from the Stratford River Festival I found myself in what ended up to be a queue of reputedly forty boats when the retaining strap of the bottom gate at lock 39 (The Odd Lock) on the Southern Stratford Canal decided to part company with the masonry. Being near the head of the queue I saw how Ian virtually single handed took command of the situation, liaised with boaters and repaired the lock.

I know that Ian used to work with Peter Chamberlain who had been on the canal since National Trust days and had learnt from him as these unscheduled stoppages were rather too common in those days. I hope that the other attending BW personnel watched and learnt! I'm sure that the hold-up would have been a lot longer without Ian's expertise and after a necessary wait while the cement set, the boats were on the move again within twenty-four hours.

I think Ian should be congratulated on his devotion to duty and his enthusiasm for the job. Men (and women!) like him should be encouraged for they are the public face of BW.

Yours faithfully Dusty Miller





Dear

Dusty,

Ian Trevor

Thank you for your letter dated 10 August 2009. It is always good to get positive feedback about our work and I will make sure your kind comments are passed on and will also put Ian forward as a nominee for our monthly customer service award.

Thank you again for taking the time to write to me.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Harvey
General Manager



The way Ian handled the situation only goes to emphasise the importance of the man on the ground- the face of BW. Ian is in a way unique in that he learned the eccentricities of the southern Stratford from Peter Chamberlain who had done years with the National Trust. In those days before the BW takeover the Three Pete's did everything from making emergency repairs to fabricating lock gates, from climbing into bye weirs headfirst to clear a blocked culvert, to plugging leaks where rats had burrowed their holes during the time of dereliction.

It really is time that BW had some form of apprenticeship scheme where the skills learnt from years of experience are passed on. Paper qualifications are all very well but will never substitute practical experience learned over many years. This incident really was an example that without someone with Ian's knowledge the stoppage would probably have been far longer and at a far greater cost. I could imagine heavy lifting gear being brought in whereas with a turfer (which Ian had to show the others how to work) the gate was returned to its rightful position easily and without fuss. Unfortunately many waterway operatives are not allowed to do the jobs that they used to do (must not even touch the mower!) and have to spend there time being bussed from location to location.

Unfortunately I do not hold many hopes. I fear that Ian could be a dying breed as more and more real canal men become disenchanted and morale amongst them gets lower and lower. Come on BW you have a great bunch of blokes -and blokesses out there, let them fulfil their potential.

Dusty

Progress was very slow and the tow-rope collected more and more people as we went along; at one point about twenty children were attached to the line. Kind friends kept turning up at various points until the tow-rope became a line of toiling humanity. We managed to crawl along in this manner as far as the Cocks Moor Golf Course when once more, completely exhausted, we retired for the night. By this time we were resigned to anything but were a little surprised to find Inspector Smith and six lengthsmen hailing us from the tow-path next morning at 8.20. We hurriedly organised the towing party and set off as before, perhaps a little faster owing to the added strength on the rope, but the passage was quite as difficult, if not more-so, as the bed of the canal seemed to be strewn with anything from iron bedsteads to old sacks. To make everything more dismal, it poured with rain all day. However, we negotiated the Kings Norton tunnel in fear and trepidation, as we had to cast off all bow haulers and go under our own steam. This was accomplished in fine style, owing I should imagine to the lack of refuse in the canal.

When we emerged from the tunnel, we once more collected a towing party and proceeded slowly, but surely, to Kings Norton where the new swing bridge had just been installed. The bridge worked beautifully, but unfortunately there was practically no waterway. This, of course, proved a great disadvantage and we found more man power on the tow-rope quite useless. A tractor was then called into action, but the tow-rope was broken twice and finally we were hauled through by chains. Never were we so glad to see the Worcester-Birmingham Canal. We heaved a sigh of relief and felt that at last we could get along only to find we had a sack round the propeller. This was the last straw, as by this time there was little fight left in us.

In grim silence this was removed and at last poor old 'Stentor' was able to show us what she really could do. I, at least, vowed I should never suffer such indignity again in the Stratford canal but as we passed last Sunday, low and behold, three dredgers were at work. So who knows? !!

Marjorie Lee.

Clive has found another archived gem from “The Navigation” Midlands Branch IWA magazine

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE STRATFORD CANAL. 1950

Visiting Lapworth last Sunday, I was vividly reminded, for reasons that will appear later, of our cruise through the Stratford Canal last Spring.

Having had the 'Stentor' newly painted, we decided our first journey should be through the Stratford Canal. As we anticipated a certain amount of trouble, we took with us a willing and enthusiastic crew, but little did we know what was ahead of us. We left Knowle locks in high spirits and all went well until we reached the junction of the Stratford Canal; here we ran on to mud, out came the tow-rope and we all pulled so hard that the tow-rope broke and down we all went like a row of nine pins!!! Not too good a start! A new rope was found and after renewed efforts we managed to get the boat round the bend, only to find the mud so prevalent, so we had to continue bow-hauling as far as the railway bridge a quarter of a mile distant. We then proceeded up the 19 locks under the vigilant eye of the lock-keeper and felt we were really progressing well. In fact, apart from a spot of bother with the weed boom near Enoch's Wharf and breaking a windlass winding up the drawbridge at Hockley Heath, all went well as far as Earlswood.

We began to feel the Stratford Canal had been much maligned! Alas too soon, for the moment we left Lady Lane Wharf our troubles began and we got stuck on the first bend where a crowd of willing helpers foregathered all pushing and pulling. To make matters worse the filter got choked with weeds thereby putting the engine out of action. We actually moved one mile in three hours, having struggled desperately until 10.00 p.m. and quite dark whence we retired to the boat for light refreshments, all utterly exhausted.

Next morning we all awoke with aching limbs and braced ourselves to face the worst - we were not disappointed! The lengthsman turned up to help but the going was just as bad; weeds choked the filter and the engine was out of action most of the way so that bow-hauling was once more the order of the day.

The Future of British Waterways

SonACS member Alasdair Lawrance writes:-

BW has been holding meetings around the country to present its proposals about future funding. Your correspondent went to two of them, at the IWA National at Ratcliffe-on-Soar, over the August bank Holiday, and at Hatton on September 5.

The turn-out of just 11 at Hatton was a bit disappointing, considering the importance of the proposals, but was understandable considering the lack of repeat publicity - not many of us make appointments more than six months ahead. It was none-the-less interesting to hear the proposals from Simon Salem BA, MBA, who is the 'Marketing & Customer Services Director' and chaired the meeting. Dean Davies was also there - he is the new manager for this patch from November.

Two main points stood out from the meeting. One was that Simon said that he thought that proposing the National Trust as a possible model was not appropriate, and anyone who is a member of that organisation will know why that is a relief - NT members have no control over its management, although membership is voluntary. He also said that he ".....thought it most unlikely that a future Board or Trustees of however the new organisation was structured, would not include boaters". For this observer, that is a major step change from BW's management: hitherto they have blamed DEFRA for its procedures in not appointing users, principally boaters, directly to the Board. If this is to be followed through, we must take the opportunity to influence the new organisation at every turn.

To this end, it would be a good idea to have a really good turnout at the BW Annual Meeting. This is to be held at Austin Court, 80 Cambridge Street, Birmingham, B1 2NP (near the NIA), on Tuesday October 6th at 10:30 for 11:00. It's a weekday, but try to attend - it's a once in a generation chance to end the continuing dilapidation of our Waterways, and perhaps bring them in to meaningful public ownership. You have to apply for tickets either at annual.meeting@britishwaterways.co.uk or 0845 671 5530 and speak to Fiona Mahoney.

As well as Alasdair our Chairman Steve Burt and Committee member and IWA National Chairman Clive Henderson will be at the meeting and will report in the next issue. Ed.

Earlswood Motor Yacht Club Boat Festival 18-20 July 2009

Pirate Theme

Earlswood Motor Yacht Club is the only boat club on the Stratford upon Avon Canal. Two boat festivals were held in 2003 & 2004 and sadly there has been a gap in the festivities due to the prime organiser Ray Smith having been unwell for some time. He is now restored to good health and vigour. With the backing of his wife and several other live wires who also keep their boats at the club a successful Boat Festival was held in July with a Pirate theme. There were dinghyboat time trials for all differing groups of people, narrow boat handling, children's fancy dress competition, many stalls and a BBQ each afternoon.



Our chairman Steve with his wife Beryl manned a tent promoting the Stratford canal with display boards, leaflets and items of interest. This attracted a constant stream of people to chat and ask questions.



The weather was kind, Saturday being hot and sunny, and most of Sunday too and it wasn't until the prize-giving (which luckily was held in the club room) that a deluge descended on the half cleared stalls. A very successful weekend.

Joan

Steve has the unenviable task of judging the Pirate Costume Competition. He diplomatically awards 1st prize to all contestants

The new bridge is wide and spacious leaving room for those who want to lean on the railings and gaze on the river. The gardens are enhanced by fountains and statues placed at intervals. In fact since I was last in the basin the area surrounding the gardens has had a facelift and all shops and establishments are spotlessly clean and efficient - and the bikers are back!



The Vole

Villagers to fight plans for a 106 berth marina on the Stratford Canal

That was the headline in the Stratford Herald on 6th August 2009 .

It was revealed that permanent berthing for 106 canal boats was planned for Lowsonford the report said and a group of residents known as the Lowsonford Anti Marina Group circulated nearly 500 homes calling for support.

The development is proposed on 6.7 acres belonging to local land owners and is 150 yard from the village hall which is over the boundary of the local conservation area defined as being "of special architectural or historical interest....." Whether over the boundary means within or without, it didn't make clear. A spokesperson for the group told the Herald " We are coordinating a process against the plan because there are indications of a considerable body of opinion against this development in a quiet hamlet like ours..." Maggie Walker, a regular boater on this section said that there was a lack of both mooring and marina facilities on the Stratford Canal.

There seems to be some illusion that Narrowboaters are directly related to the Vikings, intent on rape and pillage. There is certainly a need for offline moorings which would provide for those that moor permanently on the towpath often in the most awkward of places.

This site seems to be very near to where the Society has been urging BW to put in a winding hole as this section badly needs one. The nearest are south at Preston Bagot and north at Dick's Lane both a couple of hours and quite a few locks away.

The Vole



It has been a better summer than the previous two but not so good as we had been led to believe by the forecasters.

Hire boat firms have had an excellent season probably due to the "why not have a holiday at home this year" trend. Drawn by the tranquil life style of the canals and avoiding the ever increasing charges for everything to do with flying abroad, boats in this area have

proceeded in dizzying numbers around the Warwickshire Ring all through the summer. We did have a brief period of flooding on the Avon but this provided an element of excitement and did not become dangerous.



The crowds attending the Stratford River Festival enjoyed mostly excellent weather. The masses of boats, dressed overall in colourful bunting made a fine sight on the majestic river outside the still-not-completed theatre. On Saturday morning I came across two ladies from New Zealand intent on doing the

Shakespeare "thing" but on hearing about the river festival were easily diverted to the riverside where they were impressed with the array of boats and intrigued with the idea they could be lived on. I had to dash off somewhere and left them in the capable hands of Helen Henderson and last saw them disappearing down the steps of her boat. Later I was able to spend several days in the Bancroft basin and was able to take in the completed gardens and the crowds who were enjoying them. The wide walkways are ideal for pushchairs, wheelchairs, scooters for the not-so-fit and small children on bicycles. The remaining trees stand tall and proud providing shade on hot days. Many entertainments are provided and music comes from all quarters. It was most a relaxing scene. The gardens are kept immaculate by a team of workers who pick up, empty bins and mechanically sweep, constantly.

Society Cruise 2010

The IWA National Festival next year is returning to Beale Park on the River Thames.

It has been suggested that members with boats may like to join up and cruise there together.

If anyone is interested in making up a Society representation or even if you would like to join up just for a social cruise please let the committee know.

The National is held over the Summer Bank Holiday.

David Hutchings Steps

Members will probably recall that the Society donated £1000 to a fund set up to provide a permanent memorial to David Hutchings. This was to be in the form of a landing stage and steps up to the Holy Trinity Church on the River Avon.

The first application was rejected following objections from neighbours fearing that hoards of visiting boaters would look over their fences. A new and modified application was submitted by the clergy which alleviated these fears but has now been "pending" for several months. I understand through the grapevine that the council have issues with access from their land and several other trivial minor points. Reading between the lines, the reason for the indecision wouldn't be that the Council has grossly overspent on the disastrous Bancroft Gardens and with plans afoot to "update" the area from Waterside to the Church in similar manner, they are finding every possible excuse to turn down this application, would it? We owe David an enormous and eternal debt for without his drive and enthusiasm it is likely that there would be no canal into Stratford and the river would still be just a stretch for day trippers to hire punts and rowing boats.

I therefore urge all members to go to <http://apps.stratford.gov.uk/planning> entering ref 09/00758/FUL where you can enter your comments.

Dusty

My Early Waterway Memories (part 4)

by Colin Scrivener

Beginning with the "Cornwall" cont.

During the week Ron North contacted me and I was invited to join them again, so on the following Saturday afternoon I went to the drawbridge to meet the boats, and after working through the bridge we set off for Kings Norton. We struggled slowly through the shallow waters, having particular problems through the bridges around the housing estates of Yardley Wood due to the junk that was thrown into the canal. The rowing boats and canoes from the two local boat stations were shallow enough to pass through these bridges. Then came the excitement of passing through the Brandwood Tunnel where we had more problems with the rubbish thrown into the canal from each portal. The deck of the damaged drawbridge at Tunnel Lane had already been jacked up and we crept underneath with hardly an inch to spare before heading for the junction lock. We had to dodge the drips from the raised gates of the unique guillotine lock, built to prevent water passing between the two rival canals, as the boats were worked through. At the junction we turned right into the Worcester

Birmingham canal and continued in deep water to Cadbury's wharf at Bournville where the Rosalind lived and Cornwall was to be temporarily kept. This wharf was still used by the boats coming from Cadbury's Knighton factory on the Shropshire Union canal and those which took chocolate crumb to their factory at Frampton-on-Severn.

The area around Kings Norton junction had looked so interesting that I went back a few weeks later by bicycle to have a better look. I took pictures of the fleet of five smartly turned out day boats that were used by the Kings Norton Paper Mills to bring their coal from Cannock Chase to be shovelled into the canalside boilerhouse. The Tunnel Lane



Kings Norton Paper mills and fleet of boats, May 1949.



Cornwall tied at Bittell reservoir on the IWA outing, June 1949.

Birmingham canal from Worcester Wharf, Birmingham, to Bittell reservoir and back. The local officers of the Docks and Inland Waterways Executive were becoming worried about all this local publicity so that they had decided that the Board of Trade regulations covering passenger carrying would now apply to motor boats on canals which restricted us to twelve passengers on each boat. It was a fascinating day out with many new things to see. The leafy exit from Birmingham through Edgbaston and the junction with the Dudley canal at Selly Oak where we stopped for a break to look at the stop lock that appeared quite usable apart from the heavy padlocks fastening the gates. Resuming our journey we passed Cadbury's Waterside depot, Kings Norton junction and then reached the main highlight of the trip, the passage of the 2726 yard long Washhills tunnel. Being the first boat through for some time meant that the air was perfectly clear, so that once we were a little way inside we could see the pinpoint of sunlight at the other end that slowly grew larger until we burst out into the wooded cutting, blinking in the bright light. We made a stop for refreshment at the Hopwood House before continuing to Bittell where the boats were turned. Here we tied to the reservoir embankment so that people could have a stroll around the reservoir before setting off back to Birmingham to round off a perfect June day.

only two on the road frontage, that appeared to have turned its back to the world, and the towering frames of the guillotine gates, was like stepping back in time. How different it all is now!

In June I was again invited to go on a day trip with the Cornwall that had been planned by the Midlands Branch of the I.W.A. to be a public trip along the Worcester