

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

# CANAL CUTTINGS

VOLUME 9 Number 1  
Spring 2019



## **National Waterways Group Aids SCARS**

Specialist equipment and personnel from the Inland Waterways Association's Waterway Recovery Group boosted our Work Party's clean-up between Bewsey Lock and Bewsey Bridge in February  
See inside for the Report, and more pictures

# Sankey Canal Restoration Society

**Registered Charity Number 702571**

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**Founded 1985**



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Keith Morley (Halton) Steve Parish (Warrington)

Paul McQuade (St. Helens)

**The Inland Waterways Association:**

Colin Greenall (Chester & Merseyside Branch)

# Sankey Canal Restoration Society

## CANAL CUTTINGS

### VOLUME 9 NUMBER 1: Spring 2019

Editor and Production: David Long  
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### *The Chairman's Report—from Colin Greenall*

I hope that you all enjoyed the Christmas festivities and that by now you are now beginning to think about getting out and about along the towpath and to enjoy some fresh air.

Since the last issue of "Canal Cuttings" we have had published a new Edition of "The Sankey Canal Towpath Guide", and that by now all paid-up members will have received their complimentary copy. I'm sure you will agree is an excellent guide to our canal. Our other publications, "The Sankey Canal Story" & "How did St.Helens Grow", continue to sell well. Details of their availability can be found elsewhere. The coming months are looking like being a very busy time for the Society, beginning with our AGM due at the end of March. Our Guest Speaker will be Bob Roach from Halton Heritage, telling us about "The History of Crossing the Mersey at Runcorn Gap".

Whilst on the subject—in your AGM papers you'll read "The move towards Gift Aid has been abandoned owing to the minimal benefits that this would bring" - however, this was reconsidered by the Committee after a volunteer came forward to run the scheme for SCARS, and a back claim has been submitted.

Then we will be entering in to the show season were we are already booked into Willow Park Rural Craft Display, Lymm Transport Rally and Newton Town Show etc.

We are looking forward to joining in with the St Helens “Year of the Environment” during the coming year—we have responded to the request to say if would we be interested in taking part, but have no further information as yet.

St Helens Council are reviewing the future of their Park & Green Spaces and we have been consulted on a Heritage Strategy Survey which they are carrying out. Our “Sankey Canal Story” Exhibition Panels will be going on display at the North West Museum of Road Transport after recently completing a long run at the “World of Glass”.

Just before Christmas the Milestone “9 Mile to Ferry Lock” was installed at the end of Coopers Lane near to Havanah Flashes and milestone “10 Mile to Ferry Lock” went in between Blackbrook Road and Old Double Locks during January. I am also pleased to report that we have received sponsorship from the IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch for four milestone which will be endorsed with “Sponsored by IWA Chester & Merseyside”.

Our work parties have been very busy too with events on the canal at Blackbrook and Bewsey Lock (see Work Party Report)

Finally to end on, it is with great sadness that I have to report the passing of two early supporters of SCARS. Firstly, David Smith, the husband of former IWA National Chairman Audrey Smith OBE, who during her term of office rendered great service to the Society during a time when the then British Waterways were trying selling off piecemeal the line of the Sankey Canal. Secondly, Sir John Johnson, our first President. His Obituary will be found elsewhere in this issue.

I hope you can all find time to enjoy the coming light nights and warmer days and get out there and take walk along the Sankey Canal.

*Colin Greenall*

**Follow SCARS on any of the social media platforms and keep up-to-date on our activities and news. Find us on:**



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Sankey Canal Restoration Society

Twitter: Sankey Canal @scars567



Instagram: Sankey Canal Restoration: sankeycanal1757



# Report From Our Work Parties

*By Colin Greenall*

During the past few months our team of work party volunteers have been very busy clearing trees and unwanted vegetation from the canal between Blackbrook Road Bridge and the entrance to Stanley Bank Basin, and from around Bewsey Lock.

**Sundays 9th December and 13th January:** our volunteers (*below*) cleared scrub and overhanging branches for about 50 metres north of Blackbrook Road Bridge. It looks a great deal better than it was, with the canal twice looking as wide, with a good view upstream.





**Sunday 3rd February:** our volunteers were joined by members of the IWA's Waterway Recovery Group NW, and its Forestry Team—a 22-strong workforce—at Bewsey.

Using the chain saw skills of Paul Shaw from WRG Forestry Team and the Chipper provided by tree surgeon Ian Asbury, the group managed to clear approximately 200 yard of canal tow-path of unwanted trees and vegetation between Bewsey Lock and Bewsey Bridge. Judging by the comments of passers-by this was much appreciated.







## WANTED—Volunteers

*These pics of our Work Parties show what just a few volunteers can achieve—with more folk, we could do much more.*

*Why not join in? The work you put in depends on you and what you feel capable of.*

*If you would like to get a little involved in an informal day in the fresh air and do something to clear up our local environment then contact me on: 01744 600656 or email me at : [johnhughes11@virginmedia.com](mailto:johnhughes11@virginmedia.com) John Hughes*

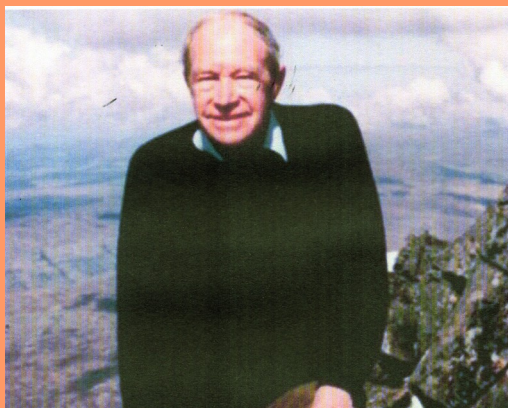




## More Sankey Milestones

Yet more milestone have been installed beside the canal towards its northern end — the first, (*upper pic*) “9 Mile to Ferry Lock”, is located at the end of Coopers Lane, near to Havanah Flashes, the second, (*lower pic*) “10 Mile to Ferry Lock”, is about halfway between Blackbrook Road and the Old Double Lock.





## **In Memoriam: Sir John Johnson 1930-2018**

We must sadly announce the death of our past president, Sir John Johnson, in November last year.

In response to a request from the Society, Lady Johnson has kindly made available a resume of his life on which the following article is based.

“Born in Bihar, India, Sir John returned to the U K to live with his grandmother before attending Manchester Grammar School. From there he went up to Keble College, Oxford to read French and German.

Following further training he was appointed District Officer for land consolidation in Kenya, then still under British colonial rule. There was great unrest at the time in the country as factions within the population fought for independence, but Sir John was able to forge relationships with local politicians, tribal leaders and the British settlers alike, helping to ease the tension. His determination to learn about the country and its people served him in good stead.

Sir John left Kenya in 1964 to serve as Administrator to the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of UK Universities before joining the Foreign Office. He was then posted to Algeria, Barbados, Nigeria and Chad to give of his wide experience. Eventually he was appointed High Commissioner for Zambia, followed a few years later in the same position in Kenya, a place close to his heart. Following his ‘retirement’ in 1990 he returned to the UK where he was regarded as an expert on Africa. He became involved in training diplomats, advising Government on National Parks, becoming a member of the Royal Geographical Society, whilst enjoying his passion for walking and climbing in the Chiltern Hills and Scotland. He also found time to publish some of his writings about Kenya and colonial rule in Africa.”

Sir John was our President for many of the early years of SCARS’ existence, having come to the Society through our mutual links with the Groundwork Trust during his time as Chairman of the Countryside Commission.

He knew the Sankey Canal well, having been brought up in Newton -le-Willows, and fondly remembered his days as a young boy playing down by the canal.

This capable and confident gentleman, the turn-to source for solutions to so many national and international difficulties could still spare the time to act on SCARS behalf for which the Society will always be grateful. He supported us on various occasions when an influential name counted for a great deal. A very modest man, he seldom spoke about his past history, but as a highly regarded diplomat this would have been second nature to him.



# News Round-Up Around the Boroughs

*by Colin Greenall*

## ST HELENS

**Rainford Brook Dredging** Subject to money being made available from Liverpool City Region, plans are being made to carry out dredging between College Street and Merton Bank Road, where the brook runs along the line of the canal.

## WARRINGTON

**Bewsey Lock Work Party** Our recent Work Party at Bewsey Lock with WRG NW went down very well with the local people, who came out to congratulate us on all the hard work our volunteers have put into improving the Sankey Valley Park in Warrington.

## HALTON

Work continues to remove the Haul road from the Widnes Wharf salt marsh and it is hoped that the towpath will be reopened, and the canal unblocked, by the end of March.

Recent work carried out on Spike Island by a group of industrial archaeologists has Uncovered what appears to be the foundations site of a canalside crane. *(See pic below)*

It is an exciting time for the Runcorn Locks Restoration Society—they have been granted funds of £50K from the Coastal Revival Fund.



## **WANTED—More Volunteers**

Our Work Parties are perhaps our most visible volunteering opportunity—but there are other roles we need volunteers for. Maybe you could help out on our exhibition and sales stand when we attend events around the area from late Spring to early Autumn; or perhaps you have a personal skill, for instance in communications or the media, which you could put to use to help promote the Sankey and our Society—even if it's simply visiting the canal every now and again, taking photographs, and putting them up on our social media sites, or carrying out research into aspects of the canal's history, or of its associated communities or industries. But don't let yourself be limited by my imagination...

To offer your services, choose a contact from page 2 of this magazine.

*This article by Colin Greenall first appeared on the Canal & Rivers Trust Facebook page in December 2018 and is reproduced with their permission*



## The Hotties

A remarkable bit of history from Sankey Canal about a local swimming spot... and some hungry fish.

In the town centre of St Helens there is a section of Sankey Canal known locally as the “Hotties”. Pilkington’s, the local glass manufacturer dammed the canal to create a reservoir to provide cooling water for their nearby works. This hot water was then returned to the canal through sprays which produced large clouds of steam, and also raised the temperature of the canal quite considerably.



It was not unusual to find locals taking a dip in the canal after a hard day’s work at the glass works.

It was about the mid 1960’s when Owens pet shop on Westfield Street closed down that the ravenous cichlid fish appeared in the canal.

According to rumour, the owner of the shop decided to dump its remaining tropical fish stock into the warm waters of the “Hotties”. The

cichlids thrived, much to the annoyance of local anglers who reported that these aggressive fish use to bite through their lines!

These fish survived for a number of years until the glass works turned off the hot water for a few weeks to carry out some maintenance work and the fish perished as the water cooled down.



## Archive Report —from Colin Greenall and Kevin Mann

*I recently received some correspondence from Kevin Mann, who way back in 1976, was employed by Merseyside County Council who were charged with converting the Old Double Locks in St Helens into a cascade due to flooding in the area.*

### Cascading of The Old Double Locks

Kevin writes: I managed a Job Creation Scheme that undertook the work of attempting to alleviate flooding in the Blackbrook area by converting the Old Double Locks into a cascade. I am sure it would be undertaken differently now, and at the time I do recall that the Local Water Authority were proposing something far more radical, so at least the overall structure is still intact, and most of the wall stone and brickwork is buried under the spillway slab, so it could be recovered. The following photographs give us some idea of the scale of the task that was undertaken at the time

From above:

*Right:* The lock chamber before work started



*Left:* The lock chamber as the shape of the cascade becomes clear





From below:

*Top:* Looking up the chamber

*Centre:* A more distant view, in which the abutments of the swing railway bridge which crossed over the top of the lock can be seen on the right.

*Bottom:* The finished cascade after the water was reintroduced. The bridge abutments are still visible—when were they removed?

# The World of Glass Site

*By Peter Keen*

Readers will recall in a previous issue of Canal Cuttings an item concerning the Daglish Iron Foundry which was located on the bank of the canal at the Hotties. Mention was made of the condition of the site in preparation for the construction of the World of Glass, more especially the stone bases of the heavy machinery.

Since that issue some interesting photographs have come to light. One of our Committee Members, Ian Hornby, saw the work which was going on, and was far-seeing enough to take photographs of the site, which he has made available to SCARS.

*Below:* This photograph, with the cone house in the background, was taken from Chalon Way East, and shows the view from ground level. The walls of the previous Daglish Foundry building have been revealed, with spoil from the excavations piled up. It appears that they are up against the cone house, but, in fact, the canal runs across the site, between the cone house and the spoil, with the bridge carrying the Liverpool to Wigan railway line to the left, and the present terminus at the Hotties to the right.



The photographs opposite were taken from the top of the Chalon Way car park and show the layout of Daglish's premises. The Hotties lie to the right of the pictures. It is difficult to pinpoint the uses of the various areas of the old foundry, but the many stone slabs (*Top*) in the large room alongside the tree on Chalon Way East would probably have served as secure bedplates for various presses, cutters and rollers. The larger rooms at the base of the photographs could have been used as assembly areas for bridges, mining machinery, locomotives, or storage warehouses.

On the right of the lower picture is a room with massively buttressed walls. Could this have housed a heavy duty travelling crane to deal with the many castings which must have been produced over the years? There are various long narrow structures which seem to be fairly deep. In other locations these could be interpreted as water wheel pits, but a reliable source of powerful water is difficult to visualise on this site. One possibility is that they were to house large fly-wheels which served to regulate the speed of the stamping, rolling and shearing machines.



It will be noted that some walls are wider than others. The narrower ones would probably indicate a single storey building or a dividing wall whilst the wider walls would have been strong enough to support more than one storey. If anyone with any experience of iron founding can suggest uses for the various rooms, please let us know - more information would be much appreciated. Our thanks to Ian for his input, he has captured a little slice of St Helens' history which is probably quite unique.





## Local History Corner 1: The Theatre Royal

In 2009 Enid Pennington produced a detailed history of the Theatre Royal in St Helens. The item which follows is based upon this material, and has been submitted as a topic of local interest by Committee member Dave Callan

In the far off days before cinemas, television and mobile phones the opportunity for entertainment for the majority of workers whose leisure time was strictly limited rested for the most part on their own shoulders. Song and music around the house, church, and local hostelry, provided a welcome relief from the drudgery of everyday life - but best of all were the Music Halls.

St Helens had its first theatre in 1847, and could trace its lineage back to the Music Hall. It took the form of a large wooden hut with bench seats, built on the cheap by a Mr. George Harris on land in Bridge Street donated by Speak-

man's Brewery. In 1855 a heavy snow shower proved to be too much for the roof and part of it fell in. It says much for the audience that despite the collapse, the show continued.

Wood rot and fickle audiences saw the closure of the theatre in 1858. Four years later a second Theatre Royal was opened by a local solicitor, Thomas Haddock, in Milk Street. Architect-designed, it was much more substantial than its predecessor. It remained the centre of entertainment in St Helens for the next 25 years until 1887 when the theatre and site were bought out for redevelopment. It was to be three years before a replacement was ready.

Theatre Royal number three was the first to be built on the present site in Corporation Street, opened with considerable fanfare in 1890. Victorian music hall was by this time approaching its zenith as popular entertainment. The new building was as fine an example of the theatre architect's art as could be found anywhere in England outside London. Against its original estimate of £10,000 the actual cost of construction was £20,000, but it was to prove a good investment for its owners.

However, in 1893 a rival appeared. The People's Palace was opened, a somewhat ersatz version of the Royal. This had one great drawback in that it had no license for the sale or consumption of alcohol. This state of affairs continued throughout the 1890s.

Yet it was the Palace that lived and the Royal that died. On Friday 13th October 1899 the Royal was gutted by fire - but such was the enthusiasm that plans to replace it began at once. Within weeks the eminent Victorian theatre architect Frank Matcham was engaged, the site cleared and work began.

By the beginning of May 1901 the fourth Theatre Royal, (*Above, from the Local Archives*) was ready. The first show was called "With Flying Colours" and came from London's Adelphi Theatre. It played to a packed house of 1400 people; all were seated in, by modern standards, chronic discomfort. It was no place for anyone with back trouble. The late Victorian music hall fulfilled one major requirement, the facility for full audience participation. Matcham's design made this almost mandatory.

In later years, many artists were to describe the Royal as "cosy" - a nice euphemism but one which conveyed, albeit unintentionally, the warmth of a St Helens audience. (*To be continued*)

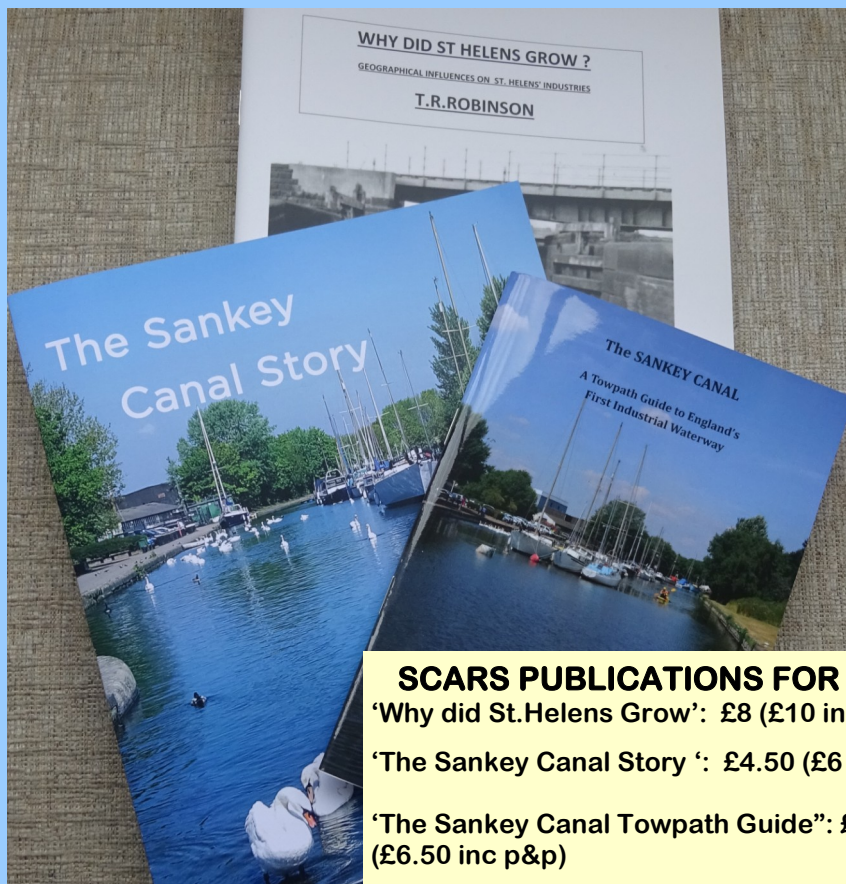


# WANTED

We are always in need of quality goods and books which we can sell at the various events we visit each year. So please get in touch if you're having a clear-out

Our sales stall is a real help in keeping our restoration projects going.

Contact Colin Greenall on 01744 731746 (evening) if you can help.



## SCARS PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE

'Why did St.Helens Grow': £8 (£10 inc p&p)

'The Sankey Canal Story ': £4.50 (£6 inc p&p)

'The Sankey Canal Towpath Guide": £ 4.80 (£6.50 inc p&p)

Order from Colin Greenall:  
16 Bleak Hill Road, Eccleston, St.Helens,  
WA10 4RW

## Local History Corner 2: THE CLOCK FACE COLLIERY GREAT WAR MEMORIAL

*By David Long*



In 2016 I began researching the names on the various War Memorials in Standish, to which I retired in 2013. Besides the three Memorials still where they were installed in the 1920s— at St Marie’s Catholic Church, at a cross-roads in the village, and in the castellated stone gatehouse, called the Peace Gate, outside St Wilfrid’s Parish Church—there were five other plaques which had been installed within the Peace Gate between 1980 and 2004. These plaques had originally been installed at the five Collieries in the parish which had been in the ownership of the massive Wigan Coal and Iron Company. In the course of my researches I found that there had been another ten such plaques installed at other pits owned by the Company, along with four others installed around the sprawling site of the Kirkless Iron and Steel

Works, the ‘Top Place’ astride the upper locks of the Wigan Flight on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

Eventually I set about researching the rest of this set of nineteen plaques. All but two of them are known to be in existence—including one still where it was installed in 1920.

Eight of the pits involved were on the fringes of Wigan—at Haigh and Aspull, Westhoughton, and Westleigh. Two are further away, with the furthest being at Manston Colliery at Worksop in Nottinghamshire. The other was at Clock Face Colliery, south of St Helens.

Wigan Coal & Iron took over the pit in 1904—its original owners, the Bold Hall Estate Company, having abandoned its efforts to develop the pit over the previous twenty years. Men from Wigan came in to complete the pit’s development, and coal-getting began in 1907.

The Chairman of WC&I Co was David Lindsay, Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, who lived at Haigh Hall above Wigan. In 1915, at the age of 43, despite being a Captain in the local Volunteer Regiment, actually enlisted as a Private in the Royal Army Medical Corps, and served at a front-line clearing station in France. Although recalled to the political arena in 1916 it is said he had ‘mixed feelings’ about the officer class as a result of his experience tending to the rank and file troops. The decision to commemorate his employees who fell in the war, and the Company’s stated commitment to taking back all returning men, finding whatever work possible for those who had been wounded, would owe something to that year at the front.

There are 22 casualties commemorated on the plaque, plus 8 others named as being given awards or honours. I was able to find details of 20 of the casualties, with just two, F Dean and John Jolley, being elusive so far (any information gratefully received). Most have addresses in the local area, and some are also listed on other local Memorials. One, Sgt. John Heaps, came from Aspull, and another, Pte. James Ellison was from Westleigh, and are both commemorated in those places. Ellison was 33, so was perhaps one of the original Wigan men involved in developing the pit, who decided to stay on.

After Clock Face closed in 1966 the plaque was moved to the Clock Face Miners Recreation Club in Crawford Street—note the street name and the tablet above the plaque, marking the opening of the club in January 1914 by the Earl.

# Membership Subscription



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**The Sankey Canal Restoration Society**  
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## “CUTTINGS” REAR VIEW: Part 1

Our new rear cover photographic feature comes courtesy of AirCam Services of St Helens, and will feature the Sankey as seen from their drone-mounted cameras.



Stanley Basin at Blackbrook from the North (*above*). The replica wharf crane can be seen left of centre.  
The cascaded Old Double Locks from the South (*below*) The first use of such locks in Britain.

