



Neath and Tennant Canals Trust

Quarterly Newsletter No. 117

September 2006.



The Neath Canal at Tyn-yr-heol Lock, Tonna - September 2006

- Chairman's Report 2005 - 2006.

Again this past year has seen the continuation of the progress made in the previous year in the restoration of the Neath Canal to navigation. During the year the Society has assisted the Neath Canal Navigation Co. to achieve the company's aim of full restoration of their canal by applying for the restoration grant aid available to the voluntary sector.

While the Neath Canal Navigation Co. were progressing with the restoration of the three locks at Clyne and maintenance activity along this section of the canal, the Society undertook the management of the restoration of Tyn-yr-heol Lock at Tonna. The work was carried out using contractors. The work, funded by a £250,000 Objective One Grant in 2005 and originally intended to fund the lock and Lock House, was only sufficient to fund the lock restoration due to the inflation increases in civil engineering costs. The majority of the restoration work was completed in January 2006 and a photo shoot was held on January 26th. and attended by the various bodies that had provided the funding and Val Lloyd AM, Chairperson of the All Party Waterways Group at the National Assembly for Wales, as the main guest.

During 2005, the Society managed to obtain some small grant aid from Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Barclays Bank and B&Q Store to assist Tyn-yr-heol Lock Restoration and other minor restoration projects. The Society also managed to obtain two NPTCBC Capital Key Fund Grants, each of £50,000 - (1) To carry out a Condition Survey of the Neath Canal between Abergarwed and Resolven to enable schemes to be prepared for the restoration link between the two locations, along with an overall study of the canal from Briton Ferry to Glynneath and (2) The replacement of the top and bottom lock gates at Resolven Lock. The survey work is now completed but due to a shortfall of approximately £8,000, the lock gate replacement has been delayed until the additional finance can be obtained. The grant for the survey will be paid to the Society during the 2006/2007 Financial Year.

The Society has been informed that it is to benefit from a donation of £4,000 from the Celtic Adventure Trust, a charity that has now disbanded. The donation is to be paid to the Society in the 2006/2007 Financial Year and will put the Society in an improved financial situation for the foreseeable future.

While the Neath Canal Navigation's contractor was carrying out improvements to the area around Tyn-yr-heol Lock, Robert Minty, the Canal Co. Manager, authorised his contractor to carry out considerable work to clear the garden area adjacent to the Tonna Workshop site, erect a river barrier along its boundary together with the erection of new fencing and a gate. This work was donated to the Society and will be of great benefit in the future development of the site. The Society is very grateful for all the work carried out and all the assistance given during the work by Mr. Bob Minty. Currently, funding is being sought by a group led by Groundwork Trust and consisting of the Society, NCN, The National Trust, Tonna Community Council and local landowners to improve the area along the canal corridor between Tonna and Aberdulais.

Two of the Society's Council of Management members volunteered to undertake extra duties as officers of the Society - Gareth Hughes took up the post of Treasurer and Hywel Jenkins that of Publicity Officer. Both posts are vital to the running of the Council of Management and I welcome and thank them for the giving of their valuable leisure time to our cause.

In September, the BBC produced a series on television titled 'The Canals of Wales' hosted by Iolo Williams and featured both the Neath and Tennant Canals. A great deal of interest and publicity was generated especially following the comment made by Mrs. Jennifer Coombe-Tennant of her hopefully seeing the Aberdulais Aqueduct restored in the future. I, as Chairman have attended several meetings with representatives of the Tennant Canal Co., CADW and the Environment Agency to discuss the present situation regarding the Aberdulais Aqueduct and its role in the future restoration proposal for a combined waterway link.

Also in September the Inland Waterways Amenity Council (IWAAC), a government body set up to advise on waterways, held their meeting at Swansea and I was invited to give a short presentation on the Neath and Tennant Canals. The council also requested a guided tour of the Neath, Tennant and Swansea Canals and provided an opportunity to make our objectives known. The days tour was followed in the evening by a formal dinner at the Marriott Hotel in Swansea.

I have attended a number of meetings at the Member's All Party Group on Waterways at the National Assembly for Wales, the Vale of Neath & Swansea Integrated Waterway Regeneration Partnership and the Southern Canals Association and as a result all these organisations are kept up to date on the activities of the Society. Ian Milne and myself also conducted Julie Sharman, the then manager of British Waterways for Wales, on a tour of the Neath Canal to update BW on the restoration being undertaken on the canal.

Through Hywel Jenkins, the work of the Society is becoming better known as he has organised the display of our information panels at several of the local libraries, at the forthcoming National Eisteddfod at Swansea and the National Waterfront Museum.

The trip boat 'Thomas Dadford' is still our main source of income and continues to operate from the Neath Town Centre providing access to the canal for the general public and therefore greatly assisting in our applications for grant funding.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to all members who have contributed in the organisation and running of the Society over the past year, especially to members of the Council of Management who have given up their free time to support the Society.

Peter Ricketts (Chairman)

25th. July 2006.



That's better! When the new lock gates were fitted the builders fitted a modern paddle gear - totally alien to the type found on the Neath Canal. After intervention by our Chairman and others, a more traditional paddle gear has now been fitted.

News.

Chairman's Report:

Please note that the Chairman's Report was written in July and was presented at the Annual General Meeting on the 25th. July. Some of the events mentioned have now taken place and will be commented on elsewhere in this newsletter.

New Name.

At the AGM in July it was decided that the Society should have a new name. We are now officially - Neath and Tennant Canals Trust Limited. The name has been changed at Companies House and we are now in the process of changing our stationery, bank accounts etc.

Web Site.

Our new website is now up and running. We must thank Edwin Farrar's son, Richard, for the many hours of hard work he has put in preparing this site and also Edwin for being the link between the Society and Richard. The web site address is:

www.neath-tennant-canals.org.uk

The web site is updated on a regular basis and it is hoped that the newsletter will appear on it soon.

Exhibitions.

Our Canal Exhibition Panels have been busy lately - as mentioned in the Chairman's Report, they have been exhibited at local libraries and at the National Eisteddfod which was held in Swansea at the beginning of August. At present they are at the National Trust site in Aberdulais which has just re-opened after a major face lift. Finally, they will be on display at the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea during October, November and December.

Social Evenings

Our monthly Social Evenings have been very poorly attended for some time so it has been decided to stop them for the time being until a more suitable venue can be found. More details in the next newsletter.

Thomas Dadford

The Thomas Dadford was re-launched after its winter overhaul just before Easter. We had a good start to the season with good passenger numbers on a few weekends - then the engine began to fail. Many attempts have been made to find the problem, but it has meant that the boat was out of action for the peak summer months. Many thanks to the members who have been taking the engine to and from the engine repairers. At the time of writing the engine has not been repaired. Hopefully the problem will be sorted and we will have a trouble free season next year!

Work Parties

A number of work parties have taken place lately - mainly clearing the Tonna Workshop site, which was used by the contractor restoring Tyn-yr-heol Lock. For details of work parties please contact Malcolm Smith - Work Party Co-ordinator



The new refurbished by-pass weir at Tyn-yr-heol Lock



Tonna Workshops after the clean-up. The pipe remains in place bringing Water from the River Neath to the canal to maintain water levels until Ynysbwlllog Aqueduct is completed.



The new gate into the garden area and a recently cleaned car parking



Tyn-yr-heol Lock, Tonna - looking towards Neath



The stretch up-stream of Tyn-yr-heol Lock - now in water

Chairman's Thoughts on Fund Raising

During the past couple of years I have been stating the importance of appointing a Treasurer, Publicity Officer and Fund Raising Organiser. I am pleased to say we now have a Treasurer and a Publicity Officer but we still need a Fund Raising Organiser.

If the Trust is to play a high profile part in the ongoing strategy of the restoration of the Neath and Tennant Canals and the linking of the canal system into the new SA1 project in Swansea, then it must add its active support to a selected number of the many schemes that will be required to complete the total restoration. Involvement in the restoration schemes will not be possible, as these restoration schemes will be led by the canal owners, which in the future could be the local authorities.

Of the major schemes that have already been undertaken by NCN to restore the Neath Canal, we have only contributed sponsorship to two schemes and only in kind. This has had some disadvantage when making applications for other restoration funding. Funding bodies administered by local government or national bodies readily accept the donation in kind from organisations in the voluntary sector, but funding obtained from the private sector, however small, prefer the sponsorship contribution from the applicant and any supporting sponsorship to be of the financial kind.

Many other canal trusts carry out extensive fund raising to support restoration projects by the injection of capital. The future activities of the Neath and Tennant Canals Trust must follow this trend. At present our fund raising is only barely enough to cover our annual expenditure on insurance, expenses, subscriptions and patronage to civic and inland waterways bodies.

I have requested many times in the past for the post of Fund Raising to be reinstated, and filled by preferably a member of the Council of Management, but to date there have been no volunteers. In the present situation where it is required that we be very competitive and aggressive in our attitude and approach to restoration, if we continue as at present there will be no alternative but to withdraw from the front line of campaigning, resulting in the gradual decline in the effective influence this Trust has on local canal restoration, which will be attributed to the lack of funding.

Peter Ricketts.

Letters to the Editor:

Dear Editor:

I was a founder member of the Society, as we were called in those early days, when the committee often sat until one in the morning! I was Treasurer for a period and then Social Secretary. Many of the old stalwarts are still working for the Trust such as Ian, Malcolm, Edwin, Peter and Elliot. You're a stalwart too, Ted, but not so old! I moved to Bristol in the mid-eighties and was no longer able to be involved but have always kept my membership. I was known as Ann Evans in those days but have since gone back to my maiden name, reclaiming my grandmother's name of Letitia along the way, hence my present name, Letitia Anne Rhys. I am thrilled when I read the newsletter to find out about all the marvellous work that is still being done. You are millionaires in comparison to the amount of money we had in the early days - or didn't have is nearer the truth!

Fund raising was really important. I've still got my miniature brick and samples of all the Christmas cards we produced. Pat Messant sketched many of these. I remember the day when we had a Summer fete and it rained and rained. The Jazz Band covered their uniforms in transparent plastic bags from the dry cleaners, eventually they had to retreat to the arches. When I got home I had to turn the heating on, not only to dry me out but also to dry out the £5 notes! And the Fireworks Displays - with Jen in charge of the hot dogs, with or without onions! Remember the proud day when we had our first award from the Prince himself, ruby velvet drapes and silver salvers, grape scissors and smoked salmon - all at Aberdulais Basin. I've got the photo to remember. Good days and great people.

Each time I read your requests for articles in the Newsletter I intend to send in a poem or something and at last I've done it. The poem is about my grandfather or Tadcu as I called him in Welsh. I'm sure that many of the old canal cottages had similar gardens, they really were gardens that filled the senses, with most of the flowers and vegetables grown from seed or cuttings. Everything was real, the flowers were perfumed and in a wide variety of colours, season followed season in the way nature intended. Jac Bwgan Bran is a scarecrow.

Yours sincerely,

Letitia Anne Rhys
Uplands, Swansea.

Questions and Answers:

Members are invited to send in their canal related questions for other members to answer.

Here are a couple which arrived this month:

Q. When two horses pulling barges and travelling in opposite directions met on the towpath, how did they pass?

Q. How were 'rope grooves' made on the stone parapets of canal bridges?

Send your replies to the Editor (address on the back page)

Ifan John's Garden

Plums called Victoria,
bitter-sweet damsons,
red currants mixed with black.

Raspberries like rubies,
gooseberries and Russets,
strawberries nesting in hay.

Turkeys fattening for December,
one for you Tadcu, one for Mam,
and one to sell in the County Show.

Jac Bwgan Bran made of straw,
dressed in flannel to keep him dry,
wears a necklace of pop-bottle tops.

Carrots, cabbage and kidney shaped beans,
purple-veined beets and peas -
proud as your prize-winning onions.

Long-legged lovage blue as my Sunday frock,
bees drooling in lavender and thyme,
Asparagus fern waving at Tansy.

Sweet William teasing Marigold,
in Night-scented borders,
Wallflowers gazing at Love-in-the-mist

Tadcu Ifan John and me,
hand in hand with each season,
in Aman Valley's Eden.

Letitia Anne Rhys.

Your Council of Management 2006/2007.

Chairman: Peter Ricketts

Vice Chairman and Work Party Co-ordinator:
Malcolm Smith

General Secretary: Ian Milne

Treasurer: Gareth Hughes.

Membership Secretary: Trevor Morgan

Publicity Officer: Hywel Jenkins

Social Secretary: Vacant.

Other Directors:

Edwin Farrar
Veronica Warren
Ted Porter
Mike Jones
Margaret Ifold

Articles, letters, photographs etc. are always needed to keep your newsletter interesting. All contributions should be sent to the Editor:

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Contributions should reach the editor by the first week of the month of publication i.e. March, June, September & December.