



Neath and Tennant Canals Trust

Quarterly Newsletter – No. 123

March 2008



**Andrew and his team from the Tennant Canal Company tree
trimming on the Tennant Canal near Neath Abbey in
February 2008.**

News

Thomas Dadford. The Thomas Dadford is due to be re-launched any day now ready for the 2008 season. Trips start on 22nd. March from B&Q. During the winter months work parties have been held preparing the boat for another busy season. Some welding has been done on the hull and repairs carried out to the inside. This year we will be operating from B&Q and Aberdulais Basin. During the early part of the season, trips will start at B&Q but once Ynysbwllog Aqueduct is open and NCN have completed water level tests, we will be able to use the newly restored locks and use Aberdulais Basin. A timetable is printed on the opposite page.

Work Parties. A number of work parties have been held recently. As well as the work on Thomas Dadford mentioned above, clearing and stonework repair has been carried out at Aberdulais Basin in readiness for the boat trips.

Ynysbwllog Aqueduct. Work is progressing well and it is hoped that the aqueduct will be finished by the end of March. An official opening ceremony is being planned which should bring good publicity for the canal.

Exhibitions. The Trust has bought a new set of display boards which are being used to display the work of the Trust. They were used at the Family History Event at the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea just before Christmas and will be used at a number of events during 2008 including the South Wales Boat Show at Margam Park over the weekend of 13th – 15th. June (for further details go to www.southwalesboatshow.co.uk) and the Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust Roadshow at Swansea Museum in July. (more details in the June Newsletter) If you would like to help to man our stall at these events, please contact Hywel Jenkins our Publicity Officer.

In the Press. The following recently appeared in the press –

“The canal basin at Resolven in the Neath Valley is playing an important role in Welsh Sport. Over the last four years, it has been the venue for developing canoe water polo. Both the Welsh Squad and the Aberfan team regularly train in the basin. The 20 strong Welsh Squad meet at least once a week in all weathers and during the winter months set up floodlights so that training can go ahead in the dark.

Welsh Canoe Association’s Tony Griffiths said they has searched right across South Wales but nowhere matched Resolven basin. The regeneration of the Neath Canal has been a feature of Neath Port Talbot Council’s plans to develop communities and attract tourists to the area.

The use of the basin for canoe water polo helps to maintain it as an attraction for everyone and provides entertainment during practice sessions and competitions.

Leader of the Council, Derek Vaughan, said ‘The development of the canal is important to the future of the area and I am delighted it is also playing a vital role in developing sport in this part of Wales.’ “

Neath and Tennant Canals Trust

Canal Boat Trips

From B&Q Neath

Saturdays from 22nd. March until 31st May 2008

Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays
From July 21st until August 29th.

From Aberdulais Basin

Saturdays and Sundays
From June 1st until July 20th.

And then

Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays
From July 23rd until August 31st.

Times for all trips

11.00 a.m. 12.30 p.m. and 2.30 p.m.

Adults - £4 Children £2

Charters available at other times.

For full details please telephone 01792 426449

Letters to the Editor.

Dear Sir,

It was well worth re-reading the article about the goods carried on the Tennant Canal in the last newsletter and written by the then sprightly Ian Milne way back in the 1970s.

William Shakespeare wrote that 'Old men are living histories' so I would like to offer a couple of comments which younger members might find informative.

I have always understood that black blasting powder for use in quarries was manufactured at the Powder Works in Pontneddfechan for use all over the world. I also understood that the towing horses were shod with copper horseshoes presumably fixed with copper nails. I doubt if the boats showed a red light on the stern. More likely the oil lamp was carried far astern by a lamp-boy. I suppose nobody knows what footwear the barges wore. My father always hammered steel studs on our school boots.

I can clearly remember in the 1930s, when I lived in Bath near the Kennet and Avon Canal, skating each winter on the frozen surface. I received good advice which I will pass on – 'cracks bear, bends break!' I saved an elderly gentleman who fell through the icy surface which was 'bending'. I pulled him out with the aid of my Bob Crachitt scarf but never received a medal!

I cannot help thinking that when the oil runs out my grandchildren may see horses pulling barges down to Neath once again. Hopefully by then the Aberdulais Aqueduct will be repaired but who knows – by then the toll may well be 10 Euros!

Finally, I would like to thank all friends who sent me good wishes on my 80th Birthday. One card in particular offered this advice – the recipe for a long life is healthy eating, early nights and regular exercise. But for a happy life – go boozing, attend wild parties and enjoy rampant sex! I'm afraid my days of boozing and wild parties are over!

Best wishes,

Dave Coles (H.L.M.)

More News

Canal Car Park Set for Revamp

The car park at Resolven Basin is to receive a £50,000 makeover. Disabled parking bays will be revamped and new railings and access ramps installed. Drainage will be improved and new signposts showing visitors how to get to the canal towpath will be erected. There will be new picnic tables and seating areas near the riverbank.

New Booklet.

A new booklet which puts South Wales' Industrial Heritage in the spotlight has been launched at a ceremony at Aberdulais Falls. It will help to put South Wales on the European tourist map and could well attract more visitors to our canals.



The Trust's Exhibit at the Glamorgan Family History Event which was held at the National Waterfront Museum, Swansea last November.



Work continues on Ynysbwlllog Aqueduct – January 2008.



Tennant Canal near Neath Abbey – February 2008.



The Tennant Canal.

Sir S. T. Evans K.C. M.P.

To Gertrude Barbara Rich Tennant.

N.B.—ALL REMITTANCES TO BE MADE DIRECT TO A. T. WILLIAMS, TENNANT CANAL OFFICE, NEATH.

Date	Goods	From	To	Tons		Rate P Ton.	£	s.	d.
1908									
Oct	Poles	Dylais	Cape Copper Works	11					
Nov	do	"	"	47		36			
Dec	do	"	"	51	95	4			
									<u>13 13 6</u>

Hand 19-1-09

This invoice to Sir S.T.Evans, K.C., M.P., (1890 -1910) is for the carriage of 96 tons of wooden poles from Dylais to the Cape Copper Co at Red Jacket in 1908. The total amount is £3 -13 -6d The green wooden poles were used to stir the molten copper in the copper purification process. The poles were probably grown and harvested in the Neath Valley on land owned by Sir Evans, whose home was at Cwrt Herbert, Neath.

About this time, the Tennant Canal had introduced a charge per ton carried over the total or part length of canal.

Gertrude Barbara Rich Tennant, to whom this invoice was payable, was the wife of Charles Tennant, the son of George Tennant. She was born on 4th. November 1819 and died on 27th. April 1919 – living for almost 100 years!

Don't forget to visit our Website – it is updated regularly so there is always something new to see.

www.neath-tennant-canals.org.uk

Re- article in December 2007 Issue of the Newsletter – Goods Carried on the Tennant Canal.

Gunpowder Works, Pontneddfechan.

Only the horses which worked within the confines of the powder works were shod with copper shoes. This was a preventative measure to lessen the possibility of a spark from the horse's shoes igniting gunpowder dust which in turn could have caused a fire and could have resulted in a major explosion at the works. In the early 1980s I visited Tom Pritchard, a former employee at the Gunpowder Works who was still living at Rose Cottage within the precincts of the old works. He showed me several artefacts associated with the works and among them was a copper horseshoe used to shoe the horses working within the works.



The manufactured powder, for use in mining and quarrying, was transported on the canal in covered barges and travelled at night carrying a red light (oil or candle) and any spark from the conventional iron shoe of the towing horse was not considered a risk – the horse was approx 10 metres remote from the barge at the end of a towrope.

Aberdulais Aqueduct. Up to the turn of the 19th Century, the only public means of crossing the River Neath from Tonna to Aberdulais was via a ford located near the present road bridge. All other means of crossing by bridge and there were three, were all private. In ancient law, if a body was carried over private property the land could be declared a public right of way. The canal aqueduct was available to the public but for the passage of a funeral cortege, the payment of a toll of one penny was required. This was firstly to

maintain the privacy of the canal and secondly to preserve the dignity of the mourners and cortege. A dignified crossing of the river over the slipper y stones of a ford would have been difficult.

Culm.

Culm is anthracite small coal or anthracite dust. The early markets for any coal was in large lumps as the technology for burning small coal or dust was in its infancy. The trade in culm was minimal. Its main use was for drying grain and making lime. The toll rate for culm was therefore less than that of the larger coal and sometimes the coal owners would break up large anthracite (stone coal) into smaller coal and attempt to class it as culm to gain advantage of the lower tolls charged on canals and ships. The practice was put to a stop by erecting sieves or gauges at the points of dispatch to determine the grading of the coal.

Messrs Curtis & Harvey Owners
Sundry Goods Conveyed Up Neath Canal
On November 1831

<i>Boatmen</i>	<i>Graded</i>	<i>Sanded</i>	<i>Quality</i>	<i>Measures</i>	<i>Tolls</i>
<i>James Harrold</i>	<i>Dylais</i>	<i>Absent</i>	<i>Ballpetre</i>	<i>8 1/2</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Elias Leach</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Emp 1/2 Larks</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>William Harrold</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Brinstone</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>James " "</i>	<i>Neath</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Cement</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>William " "</i>	<i>Dylais</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>Brinstone</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Total</i>				<i>39</i>	<i>-</i>

Entry from the Toll Book – Neath Canal Lock 3 (Clyne Lower) – 1831.

(Source – Neath Antiquarian Society)

Many thanks to Peter Ricketts, our Chairman, for this information.

Holsworthy/Bude Canal

Final Episode.

If I told e Stanbury Wharf was busy, well tidn zackly the right word. Twas eavin, you naw, master busy, like a vair, well twas like Holsery Vair itself. There was canal boats all over the place loading and unloading. I could see eaps of sand all over the place, then there was coal, calm, slates, timber, iron, bricks and bits and pieces of leather goods, harnesses, saddles, chains, ploughs and tyne harrows. There was sheep and pigs in pens and I dunt know how many horses. There was the farmers with carts and wagons of all shapes and sizes. There was a big shed with Stacey and Sons painted on the roof. They had their own wagons all painted with Stacey and Sons on the side. I learnt that this was a firm that delivered everything from the canal to the surrounding farms up on the Bideford Road to Holsworthy Beacon and Milton Damerall, across to Bradworthy and (eres a beauty) Wool fardisworthy! Tis such a long name that the locals calls un Woosery. Then they go down to Chilsworthy, Pyeworthy, Tetcott and Clawton, which is on the main road to Lanson, (the proper way to spell un is Launceston) on the Plymouth Road.

There is a short spur on the canal from Stanhope Wharf and that goes on to Blagdonmoor Wharf, which serves Anvil Corner and Brandis Corner on the Hatherleigh Road. Twadden a very busy canal so Jonny Shaddick had three canal barges, one he used to live in and he towed the rest of um behind. He ran up and down from Stanhope to Blagdonmoor dree times a week and the farmers all came to collect their gear from the small wharf up there. His missus looked after the wharf. 'Big women er is' Jan said, 'smokes a pipe. Don't get any trouble with the locals though. Start causing trouble and er will floor un'. Jonny's gear was all painted up in greens and blues with gold letters saying 'Jonny Shaddick - Vastess Deliveries in Devon'. I'm not sure if that's the way to spell un but that was on the side and everybody knew what e meant!

Jan, Jed and Henry were stopping at Stanhope to unload but our mooring was on the other side of the canal basin, which was very wide at this point. Jed slowed Henry down as we were getting close and our boat started to lose way. However, as Jan steered the boat near the left bank Jed and Henry did not stop. They continued up the incline towards the Bideford Road. At the top they turned towards Holsery, went across the bridge and came down the incline the other side, gently easing us across the canal towards out mooring. By the time Jan steered us towards the bank, Henry had stopped and Jed was waiting to take the bow rope which Jan threw to un. Jed made that fast around the bollard. While he was doing un up, Jan jumped off and tied the rope on the stern to another bollard and the mooring was completed.

'Right then me ansomes,' said Jed. 'everybody out and if youm quick you'll be in time for the Pretty Maid.' Father ushered us on the wharf, thanked Jed and led us up the incline which Jed and Henry had not long come down and we turned right towards Holsery. As we were passing close to Labyrinth, which is a beech plantation near North Road, we looked back to see Henry in a large field with other horses contentedly feeding on grass.

St Peter's Fair – that's the proper way to write un. I'm going to write the next bit proper else I dunt think youm going to naw what I be talking about. St. Peter's Fair started, I've been told, by a Royal Charter back in the Twelfth Century to enable the local people

bring their livestock into Holsworthy to sell.

It really starts on the Friday night when the Portreve (Local Council) go around all the public houses sampling the beer, the idea being that they are checking to see if it is good enough to sell to the visitors the following day. The local hardened beer drinkers say if your pub happens to be among the last they call on you could give them well-water to drink! By that time, the Portreve, unable to stand without assistance, would pass vinegar as the best beer they had tasted all night!

St. Peter's Church, Holsworthy, is a fine building with a tower and eight bells. It has a carillon. The bells play a hymn tune every three hours. On the Saturday, Fair Day, at twelve o'clock midday, the doors of the tower open and the Pretty Maid emerges. She is elected each year by the church leaders and is escorted to the fair, introduced to the proprietors and given free rides on all the shows. The fair is then officially open.

There are rings in the church walls to tie your horses, cattle, sheep and pigs. There are pens alongside for chickens, ducks and geese. Many hundreds of people from the neighbouring farms and villages crowd around. Livestock is bought and sold. In the fields near the church there are sideshows, actors doing plays, people singing and dancing – you name it, it is there. There is a boxing ring where the locals try their luck with the men of the fair who usually let the locals think they were winning until the third round. Then they would knock them out.

In one stall they had apples hanging on a piece of string and if you gave the man some money he would give you four little balls. You threw them at the apples and if you hit one and knocked it off the string, you would be given the apple as a prize. There were swings and a big thing called a carousel or Merry-go-round which had wooden horses on it. You got on their backs and they went around and around and up and down at the same time. I had a ride on that with my sister. That was the only thing we went on. We could not afford anything else after my father had bought three hens and a cockerel in a pen made of withy (willow) saplings. We did enjoy ourselves though. Just to be there and experience the occasion will, I am sure, remain with me forever.

Then, all too soon, it was time to get back to Stanhope Wharf to meet Jan, Jed and Henry for the journey home. They had unloaded the coal and loaded the canal boat again for the return journey. We were all very tired and found our own little niches to settle down to sleep lulled by the steady beat of Henry's footsteps on the canal towpath, the gentle lapping of the water and the waft of tobacco from Jed's faithful pipe.

As I am slipping in and out of sleep, I wonder if perhaps next year I'll ask Millie Yelland if I can take her to Holsery Vair!

Jacob Treviscoe.

(N.B. Holsworthy Fair and the Pretty Maid Ceremony are still celebrated to this day)



**Neath and Tennant Canals Trust.
Council of Management 2007 – 2008.**

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

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- by the first week of the month of publication i.e. March, June, September and December.