



Neath and Tennant Canals Trust

Quarterly Newsletter

March 2010 – No. 131



Work in progress on the Neath Canal near Ynysbwllog Aqueduct.

News.

‘Thomas Dadford.’

Our trip-boat, the ‘Thomas Dadford’ has been taken to Starline Narrow Boats, Upton-upon-Severn for a complete overhaul. As mentioned in the last Newsletter, we have been actively seeking grants and funding and to date £12,000 has been obtained. This will enable the following work to be carried out –

A complete refurbishment of the inside of the boat;

Extra side windows to be fitted to increase visibility;

Possibly new windows in the front, again to increase visibility;

Possibly a new system of shutters to protect the windows when boat is moored;

A re-paint of the outside;

A new outboard engine.

Hopefully this work will not take too long and the boat will be returned to the Neath Canal ready for the training of boat crews to take place. Crew members will be contacted when training has been arranged.

Aberdulais Basin.

At the end of January a number of large coping stones were stolen from the low wall around Aberdulais Basin. A number of large boulders were placed along the entrance of the Basin to stop vehicles entering the area and the theft was reported to the police. A week later more stones were stolen!

Information Signs.

Do you remember the item in a recent Newsletter regarding new information signs which had been erected at various points along the Neath Canal towpath? Well, one of these signs has completely disappeared! It was situated between Neath and Tonna and despite a search, has not been found.

Work Parties.

No Work Parties have taken place recently. Malcolm Smith, our Work Party Co-ordinator will contact members when needed.

Ynysbwllog Aqueduct.

Work has started on an important scheme near Ynysbwllog Aqueduct and at Clyne Locks on the Neath Canal. Works will include providing a new access to the car park and slipway at Ynysbwllog Aqueduct, new signs and information boards. Planting, new surfaced paths suitable for disabled visitors and a picnic area will also be provided. At Cyd Terrace, near the Clyne Locks, new parking bays will be provided for visitors, a footpath laid alongside the canal next to the road and a pedestrian bridge built over the canal bypass weir. Other plans for the Cyd Terrace site include school artwork panels, roadside railings, information boards and signs.

News (Continued)

Neath Canal Navigation.

At the recent A.G.M. of Neath Canal Navigation, it was announced that the B.P Shares in the Company have been handed over to St. Modwen. You may remember the piece in the last newsletter about St. Modwen taking over the sites around South Wales which were previously owned by B.P. – Llandarcy, Baglan Bay, Fabian Way etc. Hopefully St. Modwen will be sympathetic to the plans NCN, the Trust, Neath Port Talbot CBC and other local bodies have for the future of the canal.

Welsh Waterways Festival 2011.

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the Neath & Tennant Canals Trust will be hosting the Welsh Waterways Festival 2011 incorporating the 2011 IWA National Trailboat Festival. Exact details have yet to be finalized but the Festival will be centred around the Ynysbwllog area hence the improvement work being carried out at the car park and launching area. Such an important event will require a lot of manpower and all Trust members are asked to help in some way. Further details will be published at a later date. If you are not sure what to expect, why not visit the 2010 Event at Newport on the 29th – 31st May.

Other Waterways News.

Defra has launched its consultation on an updated strategy for the inland waterways of England and Wales – ‘Waterways for Everyone’. The consultation sets out the wide range of benefits delivered by waterways and their associated paths etc. and seeks views about how to encourage greater recognition of these benefits by more communities. Responses can be left on the website – closing date 26th March.

Communities are being urged to get involved in a programme of presentations and workshops along the Llangollen Canal corridor. Activities include a guided badger walk, a guided walk showcasing otters and mink, building otter holts, towpath access improvements and tidy events.

Towpath Tidy 2010. In early March, British Waterways organised a programme of activities up and down the UK to tidy up, clear vegetation, and generally improve canals and rivers.

British Waterways Board Members have decided not to draw on the 1.5% pay rise recently awarded to them. The money will instead be donated to The Waterways Trust.

British Waterways has re-launched its bid to become a ‘Third Sector’ organisation. This would mean BW becoming a charity and other organisations in a similar position include museums, universities and some hospitals. As well as being the guardian of the UK’s third largest collection of listed buildings, as a charity, British Waterways would be the UK’s 13th largest by income, comparable to charities such as the British Red Cross and Barnardos.



Damage to the low wall at Aberdulais Basin.



Access improvements near Ynysbwllog Aqueduct.

Ray Milland and the Tennant Canal.

What on earth has Ray Milland got to do with the Tennant Canal? Well, I recently read his autobiography – ‘Wide-Eyed in Babylon’ and as you probably know, he was brought up in Neath in the early 1900s. His real name was Reginald Alfred John Truscott-Jones and the early part of his autobiography describes his life in and around Neath. He describes a visit to the canal – ‘When I got down to the canal there were only three or four of the gang there. On the towpath were the wheelchair cases from the soldier’s infirmary with their nurses, just watching. One of my friends had brought a blown-up pig’s bladder and they were using it to play a primitive game of water polo. I quickly stripped and joined them. Now the Tennant Canal was only rarely used at this time. It saw perhaps one barge a week, towed by a patient shire horse and loaded with grain or timber or some-such. The barge was the home of the bargee and his wife and usually a couple of kids. They were always slow and kindly people. But as I say, the boats came along very rarely and consequently the canal showed signs of neglect. The grass on the banks was very long and there were patches of weed and water crocus. Where we were swimming the canal was about twenty feet wide with an average depth of five feet, which was just right, because none of us were good swimmers. We would usually have one foot on the bottom. I am fascinated by water. I love it with a passion and can never live beyond the sight of it. But I am terrified of it, I fear it. Not the water itself, but what lies beneath. The fear and horror were born on this day.

We were laughing and yelling and slamming each other with the pig’s bladder, showing off for the people watching on the bank, when one of the kids whacked me on the head. I pretended to be mortally wounded and with eyes rolling up into my head slowly sank beneath the surface. As I reached for the bottom with my foot, it touched something, something obscenely soft and cloth covered, which moved as I shot for the surface. I screamed as I reached the air and tore for the bank and climbed out shaking with horror. One of the nurses came over and asked what had happened. I pointed to the water and said, “There’s something down there!”

As we looked it slowly broke to the surface. In the shocked silence one of the soldiers said, “It’s a body!”

And it was. A bloated woman’s body in a tweed coat, its face partly covered with swirling black hair. The soldier said, “You kids run for the police and then go home, we’ll take care of this.”

It was weeks before I could sleep at night without disturbing dreams. Then the incident began to fade.....’

How much of this story is true I do not know. It was written some 60 years after it happened so perhaps the memory had faded – e.g. the bargee living on the boat!

If any member has a story about the Neath or Tennant Canals I would be glad to print them in future Newsletters.

Editor

Peter Ricketts MBE.



Peter and Gweneira at Buckingham Palace on 17th. November 2009 following the Award Ceremony in which Peter was presented with his MBE for ‘ Services to the Conservation of the Heritage in Wales’ by HRH Prince Charles. Peter had a short conversation with HRH who asked how the restoration of the canal was progressing and he mentioned his visit to Aberdulais Basin in 1979.

Welsh Waterways Festival 2010 incorporating the 2010 IWA National Trailboat Festival.

**To be held at Kimberley Park, Newport
May 29th, 30th.31st 2010**

The Welsh Waterways Festival 2010, incorporating the 2010 IWA National Trailboat Festival will be held over the Spring Holiday Weekend in May at Kimberley Park, Newport and will be hosted by the Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust Ltd. They are supported by Newport City Council and Newport Unlimited through financial assistance to restore the waterway, rebuild the slipway below Malpas Lock and remove obstructions to the passage of boats. The Festival is also supported by Newport and S.E.Wales Business Tourism and the Inland Waterways Association.

In preparation for the Festival sections of the Mon & Brec Canal are undergoing a transformation in order to offer over two miles of open water canal and five working locks. Work started in 2008 and is nearing completion. The restoration work was undertaken by volunteers from the local community through employment provider A4e, members of the MBACT and by the Waterways Recovery Group during their summer camps.

A similar Festival was held at the same location in 2004 and attracted 12,000 visitors and over 40 trailboats. This year, a full programme of events, competitions, exhibitions and live entertainment is planned and two trip-boats will operate during the three days of the Festival. Entry to the Festival is free to members of the public. Further details on the Festival can be found on the Mon & Brec website –

www.mon-brec-canal-trust.org.uk



Damage to the low wall at Aberdulais Basin.

**Neath and Tennant Canals Trust.
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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.