

**Ymddiriedolaeth Camlesi Castell-nedd a Thennant.**



**Neath and Tennant Canals Trust**

## **Quarterly Newsletter**

**December 2011 – No. 138**

*Nadolig Llawen!*



*Happy Christmas!*

## **New Chairman's Message.**

I am privileged to have been elected as Chairman of the Council of Management of the Neath & Tennant Canals Trust.

Born and raised in West Wales, where canals were not a feature of the landscape, the canal 'bug' effectively took hold when my (then) teenage son returned enthusiastically from a canal holiday with friends and we were persuaded to have a family holiday on a hire boat. Numerous other holidays ensued culminating in the purchase of a narrow-boat, shared with another family, and more recently our own 57ft narrow-boat moored at Calcutt on the Grand Union Canal. On moving to Swansea, I was pleased to discover that there were local waterways where I could pursue my interest in canals and consequently became a member of the Swansea Canal Society and thereafter the Neath and Tennant Canals Preservation Society, as it was then known.

Unlike my predecessors - notably Peter Ricketts, MBE and other longstanding members of the Council - I am acutely aware that my involvement with the Trust has been relatively recent. The written and pictorial records, however, have served to draw my attention to the dedication and commitment of members and their families to the early restoration of the canals.

Much has been achieved in the intervening years but yet more work remains to be done to complete the restoration and unification of the separate sections of the canals to form a continuous waterway. Fulfilling such aspirations at a time of austerity is not likely to be easy but I am confident that with the on-going support of individual members, the Council of Management will embrace restoration with the same commitment it has shown in the past.

Restoration alone, however, in the absence of boating activities, will not secure the future prosperity of the canals. Indeed the effects of disuse are already evident on some restored structures and sections of the Neath Canal.

Much of the charm and attraction of the two canals reflect the manner in which their original character and architecture have been retained and restored. Built to accommodate double-ended barges and reliant on horse-power until their demise, their infrastructure did not evolve to accommodate motorised transport and as such the facilities required to support modern pleasure boats are conspicuously absent.

Studies of the feasibility and economic appraisal of restoration and regeneration of the Neath and Tennant Canals have concluded that their development to include water-based recreational activities such as private boating, boat hire and trip boats would have a substantial economic benefit to the local economy. If boats and boaters are to be attracted to local waterways, however, the provision of facilities - such as secure moorings - will be an essential prerequisite. Paradoxically, investment in such facilities is likely to be dependent upon the presence of boats and the perceived requirements of boaters.

The IWA Trail Boat Festival at Ynysarwed in May served to highlight the potential of the Neath Canal and generated very positive feedback from the 30 or so boaters who attended. Those who ventured south to Bridge Street, however, commented on the absence of dedicated boating facilities in Neath but were re-assured by the anticipated provision of facilities at the Canal Green development.

The master-plan drawn by the Prince's Foundation for NPTCBC of the regeneration of the Canal Green area - as illustrated on the Foundation's web-site - shows very limited

boating facilities which fall well short of the type of ‘canal basin / centre / moorings’ which are being actively promoted and developed at canal-side locations in towns and cities elsewhere in the UK.

Historically the canal effectively ‘passed through’ Neath en-route from Glynneath to Briton Ferry. In the absence of a focus for canal-based activities with appropriate facilities for boats within the Canal Green development - which would promote Neath as a canal centre – history may repeat itself to the detriment of both the canal and the town.

The Trust is seeking clarification relating to the details and progress of the proposed development and will actively promote the inclusion of a canal basin or similar facility.

In pursuing our goals, I am acutely aware that the Trust has been fortunate to have the support and goodwill of other stake-holders, especially the Neath Canal Navigation Company and Neath Port Talbot CBC and I look forward to maintaining those relationships.

Finally, may I thank the individual members of the Trust for your continued interest and support - and on behalf of the Council of Management, wish you a Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year.

Gareth Hughes

Prince’s Foundation website –

[www.princes-foundation.org/our-work/projects/uk/neath-port-talbot-south-west-wales](http://www.princes-foundation.org/our-work/projects/uk/neath-port-talbot-south-west-wales)



The Neath Canal in the Canal Green development area.

## Trust News

**Thomas Dadford.** Despite dreadful weather over the Whitsun weekend – Welsh Waterways Festival - we had a pretty good response to the trips on the newly re-furbished Thomas Dadford, raising nearly £500 over the weekend.

During the main season we carried over 500 passengers on the trips to Tonna Lock from Neath Town Centre with the boat receiving compliments on the new look and better viewing from the wide windows.

Our grateful thanks are extended to the crews who manned the boat throughout the season and we look forward to a successful 2012

After a very successful Season our trip boat was taken out of the water in November and taken to the Neath Canal Navigation Company yard at the Green, Neath. The boat hull has been hosed down, the engine removed and taken to Young's Boat Yard in Swansea to be serviced and stored for the winter. The boat has been covered up with a tarpaulin until the Spring when work parties will be arranged to do minor paint work and to repaint the hull.



*The 'Thomas Dadford' safely wrapped up for the winter in the NCN yard.*

The Thomas Dadford will be put back in the water just before Easter 2012 and further crew training will take place before the season starts at the Easter weekend.

**Work Parties.** Two work parties have been held in recent weeks, both at the Canal Workshops in Tonna. Weeds have been cleared from the garden area. Contact Mike Jones, Work Party Co-ordinator, for details of future work parties – Contact No – 01639 885319.

## From the Archives.

There are many members who were not members of the Trust in the early days – the 1970s – so the following snippets from early newsletters and other sources may be of interest.

Report on Public Meeting held at Neath – 6<sup>th</sup>. Aug. 1974. ( *from IWA – South Wales Section – Newsletter - Sept 1974.*) Two Neath Canal enthusiasts, John A Davies and Ian Milne, called a Public meeting at the Castle Hotel in Neath on August 6<sup>th</sup>. which was attended by more than a dozen supporters including Peter Jackson, Theo Brown, Mr & Mrs Wolfender and John Walsingham – all of the IWA. The result was the formation of the Neath and Tennant Canals Preservation Society, whose aims are to liaise with the Canal Owners and Local Authorities to see that no further encroachment or abandonment takes place and that the history and beauty of these canals may be preserved as an amenity in the area for all time. Interested people were asked to contact the Secretary of the new society – Mr John Walsingham.

*From N & T Preservation Society Newsletter No 2 – Oct. 1974 –* Work commenced on clearance of Aberdulais Basin. 40 volunteers made spectacular progress, clearing large amounts of vegetation and soil. Work continued at a later date. Discoveries included – an old dock on the railway side of the canal, the walls of which have been partially excavated; three (with rumours of five) old barges.

Diary of Events – Oct 20<sup>th</sup> 1974 – Work party at Aberdulais Basin – loan of equipment promised by Mr Idris Hale; Oct 27<sup>th</sup>. 1974 – Canal Walk – meet at Farmer's Arms, Resolven at 12.30; Nov 3<sup>rd</sup> 1974 – Work party at Aberdulais Basin; Nov 10<sup>th</sup> 1974 – Bus trip of the canals. Tickets 40p; Nov 17<sup>th</sup>. 1974 – Work Party at Aberdulais Basin; A Social Evening is being arranged for December.

The Committee has decided to undertake a feasibility study of the reclamation of the Neath Canal from Abergarwed to Glynneath.

The Manager of the Castle Hotel has offered to display old photographs, documents etc. relating to the Neath and Tennant Canals.

Officers in 1974 – Secretary – Mr J. Walsingham; Treasurer – Mr P. Williams; Chairman – Mr J.A.Davies; Newsletter Editor – Mr A George;

Two copies of each Newsletter were sent to members – one to give to a friend!

*From N & T Preservation Society Newsletter No 3 – Nov. 1974. -* All members are urged to attend an important work party next Sunday at Aberdulais Basin. Meet at 10.30 a.m. The exact reason cannot be divulged but you may be on TV.

Mrs. Kay McCullum has been appointed as Social Secretary.

Mr Peter Williams, Work Party Organiser urgently requires – railway sleepers, a tea urn, small plant and equipment, large plant (on loan) e.g. JCBs, tipper lorry etc.

*From N & T Preservation Society Newsletter No 4 – Jan. 1975. -* A Social gathering was held at the Castle Hotel on the 14<sup>th</sup> Dec. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Neath were present. The Mayor unveiled a display cabinet donated to the Society by D.J.Butler Ltd. Great interest was expressed by the Mayor and promises of support from the Council.

On Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> Dec 1975 both canals were navigated for the first time in over 40 years thanks to Mr David Moses of D.M. Marine of Skewen.

A number of grants have been applied for and the Neath Canal Navigation Company have accepted in principle the proposals put forward by the Society.

The Tennant Canal Company are prepared to allow public use of Aberdulais Basin and Aqueduct but are not prepared to sell or lease them to the Society.

That chap Ian Milne – you know, the one who keeps falling in the canal at 3 o'clock on Sunday afternoons! – would like donations of new or second-hand goods to sell/raffle at canal events. He would like members to join his sub-committee to a) help with fund-raising activities and b) to help to pull him out of the canal!

Mr. Brian Messant has been appointed Work Party Organiser at Aberdulais. Peter Williams will co-ordinate work parties on other parts of the canal.

*From N & T Preservation Society Newsletter No 6 – April. 1975-* Mr Harry Secombe has accepted our invitation to be our first President. Mayor-elect Mr Merfyn Jeffreys has accepted the Vice-presidency of the Society.

Our Hon Secretary is now – Mr Ian Milne

Works Parties – Sat 3<sup>rd</sup> and Sunday 4<sup>th</sup>. May at Aberdulais and Yscwrfa Bridge. Members from the Inland Waterways Association – South Wales Branch will be joining us for the two days. There will probably be a Social Event in Neath on the Saturday Evening – details to follow.

Yscwrfa Bridge – Society research has discovered that the plans for the new road and canal culvert make no provision for the public right of way which passes under the existing bridge to link with the north side of the A465. It is probable that the right of way extends even further along the canal course, towards Glynneath. This matter is being investigated and members are urged to write to the Secretary of State for Wales, Mr John Morris, and the West Glamorgan County Clerk, Mr Rush, registering their protest against such action and requesting that a bridge be built to accommodate both canal and right of way.

The Society staged a number of successful events over the past few weeks. On Sunday March 16<sup>th</sup>, 20 people walked the Tennant Canal from the Railway Tavern to Neath Abbey. It was a glorious day and a selection of interesting bottles were recovered from dredged silt along the canal bank. The walk ended at Neath Abbey and several members visited the Abbey Ruins. The following Sunday over 40 members departed for the Mon and Brecon Canal to take part in the Primrose Cruise run by the South Wales Branch of the IWA. The coach arrived at Gwent Boats, Mamhilad, Pontypool and we embarked on several canal day boats. A grand time was had by all and it was good to see Mr Bill Porter, Neath Canal Manager, there enjoying himself. Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> April saw a few intrepid members in small boats and rubber dinghies make a survey of the Glanywern Canal which branches off the Tennant Canal and goes for about one mile through Crumlyn Bog. It was navigable, being maintained by the Tennant Canal Company, but there was no sign of a towpath, only reeds, reeds and more reeds.

Society Programme and Aims for rest of 1975 – Neath Canal (Bridge Street to Tonna Lock) Clear towpath of undergrowth and rubbish and improve towpath surface. Clear access points and Canal Workshops at Tonna Lock. Aberdulais – Clear pound and dump silt. Ash or stone to be put on access lanes. Barges to be left. Put a plug in Aqueduct

pending agreement on temp. bridge. Maesgwyn Lock to Yscwrfa Bridge – clear towpath and lay all-weather surface. Widen canal to permit canoeing. Clear trees and debris from canal bed.

*From N & T Preservation Society Newsletter No 7 – June 1975 – Future events – Sponsored Walk. Start at Aberdulais Basin, walk along Neath Canal to Bridge Street, cross river bridge and return to Aberdulais along the Tennant Canal. ‘An Hour of Folk Music’ – organised by Swansea Guitar Society and to be held at Kilroys, Oxford Street, Swansea.*

Work party organisers – John Parkinson (Yscwrfa Bridge area) Brian Morgan (Aberdulais Basin) and David Barker (Bridge Street, Neath area)

Work Party Reports – Tonna Lock – cleared canalside growth and the old Neath canal Workshops are now visible once again. Aberdulais Basin – a front loader was lent to us by Neath Borough Council and a lot of muck was shifted and the whole site is taking shape. Yscwrfa Bridge – Almost all of the lock chamber has been cleared and the lock side has been stoned. A start has been made on the surrounding paths.

A Public Meeting was held in Resolven to enlist support.

The Society has purchased a 3.3 litre 1968 Bedford Ambulance for £70. It has proved invaluable in transporting bodies (live ones) and tools to work parties. Eventually it will be painted in N&T colours and have lettering on the sides.

The Vice-Chairman is looking into the possible purchase of a Society boat. One has been spotted in Llanelli – heavy steel construction, 36 ft long plus cabin.

We have been given an old banana wagon – ex British Railways – which will be used as a site hut at Aberdulais basin. Many thanks to Swansea Docks Board.

The Society Secretary fell into Yscwrfa Lock, from the top into a sludgy bottom – he lost his glasses, his dignity and an axe!!! He would like to thank Pete McLellan and Brian Morgan for their rescue attempts.

Work Parties will be held every Saturday and Sunday throughout June and July.

*From N & T Preservation Society Newsletter No 8 – July 1975- First the good news – not that there is any bad news! The Welsh Office had planned to buttress the A465 and culvert the canal at a point close to the point recently cleared by our members at Resolven. A letter has been received from the Welsh Office stating that a retaining wall and embankment will now be built instead of the culvert, safe-guarding the canal. This is evidence that the Society proposals are being taken seriously.*

A very successful work party was held at Resolven on June 7<sup>th</sup> when over 50 workers turned up on a scorching day.

*(to be continued)*

**Neath and Tennant Canals Trust.  
Council of Management 2011 – 2012.**

**Chairman:** Dr. Gareth Hughes

**Vice-Chairman:** Malcolm Smith

**General Secretary:** Ian Milne Tel: 01792 547902

**Company Secretary** – Huw James.

**Treasurer:** Trevor Morgan.

**Membership Secretary:** Trevor Morgan.

**Publicity Officer:** Hwyl Jenkins

**Newsletter Editor:** Ted Porter.

**Work Party Organiser:** Mike Jones

**Boat Co-ordinator:** Edwin Farrar

**Archivist:** Peter Ricketts MBE

**Other C of M Members:** Martyn Lyddon

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

Ted Porter,  
35, Alexander Road,  
Rhyddings, Neath,  
SA10 8EF

Email: [edward.porter.eurfryn@ntlworld.com](mailto:edward.porter.eurfryn@ntlworld.com)

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