

Neath and Tennant Canals Trust

Quarterly Newsletter – No. 122

December 2007



The new Aqueduct at Ynysbwllog takes shape – December 2007.

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

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Vice-Chairman and Work Party Organiser: Malcolm Smith

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Membership Secretary: Trevor Morgan.

Social Secretary: Vacant.

Publicity Officer: Hywel Jenkins.

Newsletter Editor: Ted Porter.

Other Directors:

Edwin Farrar
Jean Morgan
Mike Jones.

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.

Canal News.

Work Parties.

Work Parties have taken place recently at the Canal Basin in Aberdulais. The quay wall has been tidied up and some scrub and vegetation removed. Work will start soon on the annual maintenance of 'Thomas Dadford' which is now out of the water.

New Sweat Shirts/Jumpers.

A new logo, incorporating our new title – Neath & Tennant Canals Trust – has been designed and sweat shirts/jumpers are available bearing this logo. They can be obtained from West Wales Print, Main Road, Skewen, Neath (you can choose your own colour and size and they have the logo on file.)

Smith's Canal.

Trust member Letitia Anne Rhys has written a poem based on the Smith's Canal – see back page of this newsletter. She would be interested to know more about this canal so if you have any information, please send it to the Editor and I will pass it on to Letitia and perhaps print the information in the next newsletter.

Trust's Website.

The Trust's website continues to develop thanks mainly to Richard Farrar, Hywel Jenkins and Edwin Farrar. Other members also contribute to the content either with information or photographs. We have received many compliments about the quality of the site.

Membership.

It is important that we have a strong membership to keep the Trust healthy. Please spread the word around about the good work that we are doing and try to encourage new members. Also, please ensure that your membership is kept up to date.

Disabled Access.

Volunteers from Dyffryn Clydach have recently helped Skewen Angling Club to construct disabled access on the Tennant Canal near Neath Abbey. When complete, the project will provide seven fishing platforms which can be accessed by the disabled in wheelchairs. The project was carried out as part of the Community Service Volunteers Make a Difference Day initiative.

Tonna Woodlands Project.

As part of the Tonna Woodland Project, an artist has been commissioned to provide art features on a new wall to be constructed along part of Henfaes Road in Tonna. These features will depict local historical scenes in slate. It is hoped local schools will become involved in the project.

Restoration Update.

Tyn-yr-heol Lock.

The work of snagging, following the main restoration work to bring the lock to operational use, has still not been completed by the appointed consultant, W.S. Atkins, and the contractor, Dean & Dyball. To bring the lock back into operation ready for the 2008 season it has been decided to sign off the consultant and contractor. The Trust and NCN will apply for the final grant payments, with NCN volunteering to complete the remaining outstanding work.

To date, NCN have installed the steel channels and wooden base seal for installation of a stop board facility at the head of the lock and secured masonry around the foundation of the ground paddle stanchion. There are a number of leaks in the lock chamber wall that require re-grouting. This will be carried out when water is again available above the lock to enable it to be flooded to identify the location of leaks. Approx. one and a half ton of unused material left over from the restoration contract is to be removed from site.



Resolven Lock.

Following the appointment of the Rochdale Canal Workshops to build and install a complete set of gates and tail bridge over the lock, work of installation started on the 24th. July 2007 and was completed and tested by the 31st. July. The work is to a very high standard and was efficiently carried out. The restoration of the stonework around the lock chamber and new bridge was carried out under contract by NCN and the whole operation was financed through a grant of £50,000 from Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's Capital Key Fund. It only remains now for Neath Port Talbot Council to remove planking, installed during the above work and dredge out the silt in the lock chamber to enable the lock to be used to gain boat access to the restored section of the canal above Resolven.

Aberdulais Aqueduct.

Following the setting up of a working group, comprising NCN, CADW. OPUS (Consultants to CADW) Neath Port Talbot CBC, Tennant Canal Co., Environment Agency, Welsh Assembly Government and the Neath & Tennant Canals Trust, to investigate the possibility of restoring Aberdulais Aqueduct, progress has been made by

the securing of some grant aid to carry out a study relating to the possible restoration of the Aqueduct. At present, Hyder Contracting are carrying out a feasibility study.

Ynysbwlllog Aqueduct.

Work on demolishing the old aqueduct and building a new one started in earnest in May 2007. A delay in the start date was due to the requirement, following test borings, to redesign the piles and foundations to be used to support the new aqueduct. Following the sealing off of the canal and the removal of the steel pipes used to maintain a water supply across the old, damaged aqueduct, demolition of the remaining stonework was quickly carried out. Installation of the piles at either side of the river started in June and was completed in September when work then started on the casting of the concrete foundations. The work of constructing the abutment walls and shoulders of the aqueduct is almost complete and the trough supporting steelwork is ready for installation. The steel trough of the aqueduct is on site and will be ready for sliding into position when all the base work is completed. Due to the initial delays, the completion date of construction has now been put forward to February 2008. The additional funding of approx. £250,000 as a result of the change of specification for the piling for the new aqueduct has caused some considerable extra work for the Neath Canal Navigation Company in seeking the required extra funding. After contacting and negotiating with the various funding providers, most of the required extra funding is now in place.



Ynysbwlllog Aqueduct – looking up-stream

Enfys.

It is sad news that we hear of the cessation of the operation of the trip boat 'Enfys' and the closure of Ty Banc Cottage at Resolven. The decision to cease operations is due to the rising cost of operating the boat (now running at approx £24,000 annually) and the high cost of damage repair to 'Enfys' and their base at Ty Banc Cottage - tea rooms and gift shop – which have been continually vandalised over the past years. The Enfys Trust is seeking a new owner for the trip boat while Ty Banc will revert back to it's owner – NPTCBC, who will find an alternative use for the cottage.

Peter Ricketts.

Goods Carried on the Tennant Canal 1890 – 1901

By Ian Milne

(Reprinted from an article which appeared in Aqueduct 1979/80)

The Trust is fortunate to have in its possession the record of the goods carried along the Tennant Canal during the later years of the reign of Queen Victoria. It is a large volume, originally purchased from Whittingtons of Neath, which details the date, goods carried, owners of goods, place of origin and destination, tonnage, boat name or number, owner and steerer. An interesting feature is the spelling of certain words by what may have been a Welsh-speaking book-keeper from the Vale of Neath e.g. 'excrichen boat', for excursion boat; 'oak pouls' for oak poles; and 'oweld roap' for old rope. It is also interesting to speculate where this record was kept – it is almost certain that the venue would be the toll-house situated at Aberdulais Lock, as there is reference to 'this aqueduct'.

The entries were written, it must be remembered, during a time when traffic on the canals was in decline because of competition from the railways. During the early 1890s the culm trade was dying out, from 2773 tons in 1890 to 431 tons in 1891 - the last recorded date of carriage. Culm was carried by M.S. Williams in his own boats, from the Neath Canal, through Aberdulais to Port Tennant. The average load was 21 tons. Some boats were named 'Fanny', 'Sarah', 'Rebecca', 'Jane', 'Mary' and 'David', whilst others were named after local places e.g. 'Giant's Grave', 'Aberpergwm', 'Neath', 'Tennant', 'Gnoll', 'Criga', and 'Glynneath'. One remembered that venerable Prussian General – 'Blucher'.

The brick traffic, too, was in decline, petering out in 1891. The bricks were owned by F.R. Chroshway (Crawshay?) and were shipped from Dylais to Cadoxton. Reference is made to boats numbered 6, 8, 10 and 17. Several loads were sent by the Dinas Silica Co from Dylais to Neath Canal, Abernant, and from Millands Brick Co., Neath to the Cardonall Tinworks.

Many are the stories we have heard of the gunpowder boats coming down at night from Glynneath, along the Neath Canal, from the Gunpowder Works at Pont-nedd-fechan to the Red Jacket. The boats showed a red light as a warning and the horses were shod with brass shoes to prevent sparks from igniting the gunpowder (*This last fact has been questioned – comments please – Ed.*) A steady if diminishing trade was seen at this time – Curtis and Harvey being the owners and they ran their own boats, often with 15 ton loads in tandem. The boats were Nos 1, 2, 3 or 'Henry', 'Alfred' and 'Robert'. Some of the steerers mentioned in the book have relatives in the Glynneath area today – Thomas and William Harret, Thomas Williams, James Jones and Henry James.

The coal traffic is interesting as it dwindles almost to zero in the late 1890s. and then picks up again during the early 1900s. The coal owners were mainly W. Westlake, from Neath Canal to Port Tennant, and various coal companies from Coartbetus Bridge – Cwrtbetws? to Neath Canal, Dylais Tinworks. Boats were owned by Evans and Bevan.

A small trade in shipping sand was undertaken during 1892 for the Cape Copper Co., in Evans and Bevans boats, also in the following two years in stone and limestone for G.Palmer from Bevan's Wharf to Quacker Bridge.

The Cape Copper Company must have owned a small fleet of boats as boat number 26 is mentioned and the Trust has a photograph of boat C.C.C 21, showing a Sunday School trip about to start off along the Tennant Canal. The C.C.C. used the canal for carrying bricks, pantiles, fireclay and a vast quantity of acid.

Other interesting goods carried were castings, dramplates and dram wheels, mainly for Richard Owens, from Neath Canal Lock 2 to Neath Wharf. Copper poles, oak poles, assorted timber, old rope, pitwood, ashes, clay pipes, pea-sticks, cartwheels, cranes, barleymeal, silica, scrap tin, oil, sugar and 2 tons of rushes for the Duke of Wellington Pub in Neath were also carried, but mainly in small quantities.

Aberdulais Aqueduct was the only means of crossing the River Neath with large loads. Consequently, funeral corteges bound for St. Catwg's Church, Cadoxton from higher up the Vale of Neath, had to use this route and until 1892 were charged for the privilege of doing so. Even today, the towpath of the Tennant Canal is not a public right of way. The charge for crossing the Aqueduct at Aberdulais with a coffin was 1d. and I quote from the toll-book –

' 11th. March 1890. To 1d. Received for passing through coamishon to carey the bodey off Ebeneser Hopkins'.

' 12th. June 1892. Elizabeth Llewelyn her corpse carried over this Aqueduct by commission paid 1d.'

Surprisingly few excursion boats are mentioned, as many people remember Whitsuntide Chapel outings on the Tennant Canal to Crymlyn Burrows. Three were drawn by horses from Dylais Wharf to Crymlyn Bridge in 1891, the charge being 5/- per boat. Back in 1890 the charge was 1/- to take a 'Plecher' boat from the Neath Canal to Crymlyn Burrows.

One entry mentions that a J. Parker came across the aqueduct breaking the ice – when winters really were winters! Canal traffic would sometimes be held up for weeks at a time when the canals were frozen.

(If any members have any other stories about goods carried on the Neath and Tennant Canals, please send them to the Editor and they will be printed in future editions of the newsletter.)

N.B. 'Culm' was the waste from coal.



The 'Enfys' waits for a new owner at Ty Banc – December 2007.



Weed cutting boat on the Neath Canal at Resolven – December 2007



The new Aqueduct at Ynysbwlllog – looking upstream. (December 2007)



Holsworthy to Bude Canal – Episode 6.

Ere us be again and I promised I'd tellee a little more about Mother. Er came from just below Widemouth Bay in Cornwall. Little place called Mlook and er mother was from further down the coast again at a place called Port Isaac. Er mother's name was Belinda Steer. A big family of vishermen and they'm still in Port Isaac today.

All I wanted to tellee about is some of the Cornish sayings that mother used to say. If you wanted to open a nut, you'll aft to scatten abroad. Somebody only 99% - you shudden mind ee, poor vellow idn zackley. Left-handed person – ee da do all ut clicky 'anded. It's a shame – tis a whisht ol job o' it. Come in me ansome put ta ud in t'ole, draw up thickly stool agin ta vire, av a cup of tay an yet yersel a mite. (*If you know what this last sentence is all about, please send your answers to the Editor and there will be a prize for the most accurate translation!.*)

We'm on our way in the canal boat aving left Virworthy Wharf behind. The towpath is level here and Henry is making good time now, seemingly without any effort. He flicks his head and tail constantly as the greyflies sting him. Jed does his best to kill them with a little withy bush before they get to him but some still get through. A kingfisher plunges into the water up ahead and comes up with a tiddler in his beak. Jab Shaddick is half asleep at the stern with a hand lazily drooped over the tiller, clouds of smoke still rising from the ever faithful briar pipe he made himself. Father is asleep with a fishing rod resting on the pushpit. Mother and sister are asleep down below. The only sounds come from the birds, the steady clip clop from Henry and the water gently lapping at the keel. Even at my age I can understand the beauty of all this and I know now that I will be a 'canal man' before I am much older.

We pass through the huge Thorne embankment and then on to the Parnacott Estate run by the Dennis Brothers. Canal Farm comes next. The canal goes right through the farm in a large slow left bend straightening at Chilsworthy Aqueduct. This crosses over the River Deer. The Deer flows south and joins the Tamar at North Tamerton. Hogspark was the next farm. Jan called out to the farmer, Billy Balsdon, who was laying a hedge and holding them down with another sapling bent in a 'U' shape which he pushed into the earth. This made the hedges stock-proof as all the saplings grew and eventually became a thick hedge.

I could see that Billy was another pipe man as smoke was rising from his face as he looked out under a battered hat. Jan whispered to me "Look, Billy always wears a white shirt."

Well, Billy wore a white shirt alright. The only problem was it was the same one and it adden been washed for years! Tobacco stains, gravy stains, cabbage and beer were all evident apart from all the rest that had faded so were unrecognisable. Anything that adden stuck to the shirt continued down the trousers which were mottled to say the least.. Billy's wife had died about ten years before and that was, word has it, the last time he had washed!.

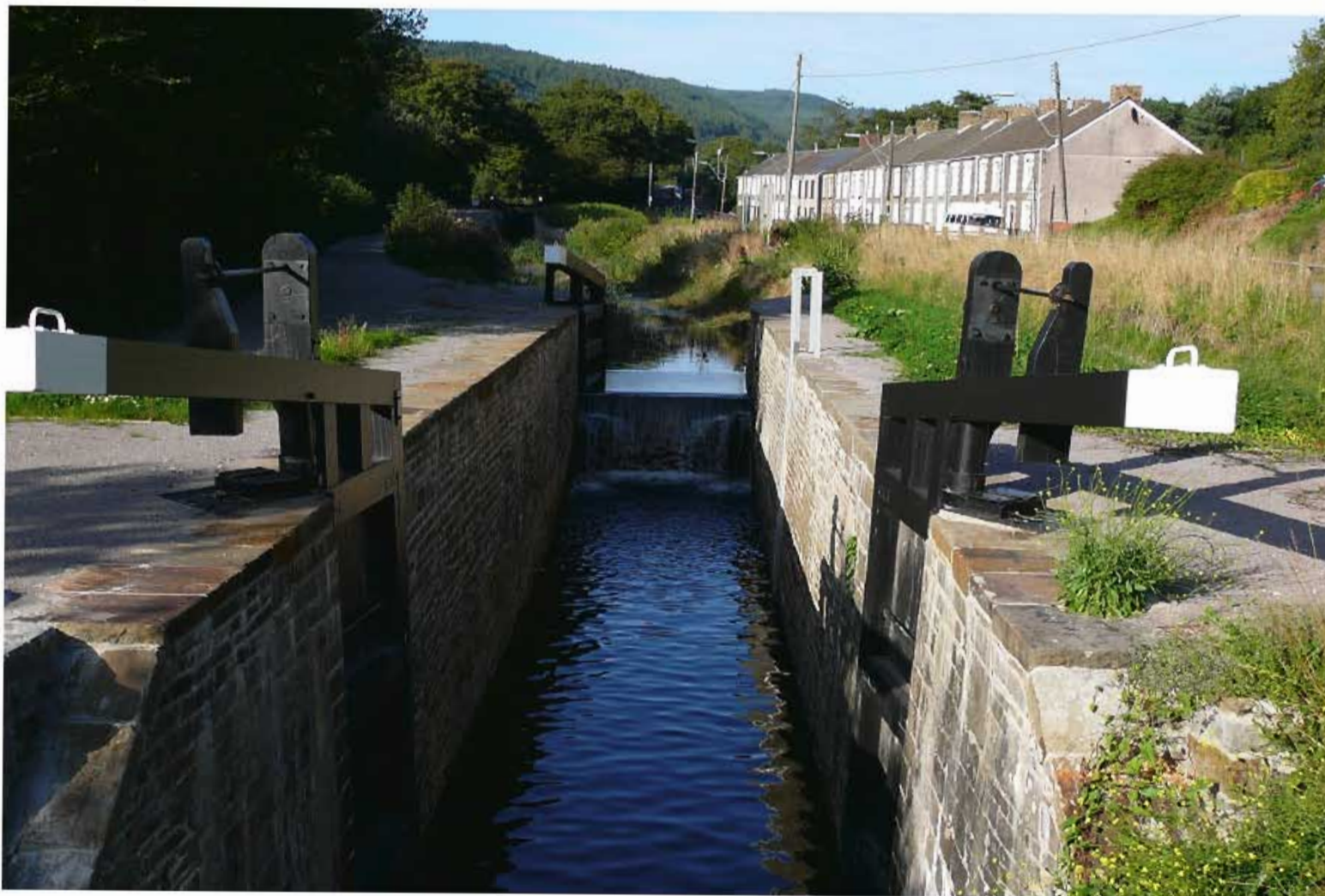
“Master job yourn doin there Billy” shouted Jan. “***** all you naw about un” said Billy. And that was that. Neither man spoke again.

The canal swung south past Manworthy Mill with its waterwheel turning slowly to work the gears grinding corn. The local farmers that didn't ave their own grinder would bring their barley and oats down to Manworthy for them to be ground down to give to the cattle. The miller would shovel the ground corn into containers and the flour that fell at the side of the corn was kept in bags for the farmer's wife to cook her nubbies (yeast buns)

Veering around to the east now and the wharf at Stanbury came into sight. Time to go.. I thought I was going to tellee about Holsery Vair this time but he'll av to wait. Promise I tellee all about en next time.

Jacob Treviscoe.

(The writer of these pieces is a Trust Member and he writes under the pen-name of 'Jacob Treviscoe . As a matter of interest, Port Isaac is the location of the popular TV series – Doc Martin.)



The locks at Clyne – December 2007

Don't forget to look at our website –
www.neath-tennant-canals.org.uk

Squire Smith's Canal.

(A child's voice – 1944)

I creep out through the side door
of St.Samlet's Church.
Their words don't hold me,
they speak a different language.

No one sees me go.
They won't miss me,
only boy sopranos matter.

The canal bridge calls.
I climb the skew – on the other side.
I sing Aion's best
Calon lan yn llawn daioni....

Smith's Canal is thick with coal dust
from his Emily pit, bent tram lines
and shavings from his sawmills,
old bedsteads, picks,
shovels and bottles – green, blue
and brown with bumps for the blind.

Under the skew
yellow flowers call out
from the bulrushes.

My patent shoes have disappeared.
My ankles
I'm sinking –
silt sucking my calves
reaching for the velvet buttons on my Sunday coat
nobody can hear me
Calon lan yn....
Ein Tad yr Hwn...
My knees
my knees are lost in the bog.

I push up
on an old shovel -
Slowly I lift
One leg – then the other – again and again –
until I'm free
my arms full of yellow flags.