

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



**Neath and Tennant Canals Trust**

## **Quarterly Newsletter**

**March 2012 – No. 139**



The Canal Workshops at Tonna with the newly fitted gates and rebuilt gate pillars. Note the cleared area on the right hand side of the workshops and the newly erected wooden fence.

## News.

### **Thomas Dadford.**

The Thomas Dadford will be re-launched soon ready for the 2012 season. Minor maintenance work has been carried out over the winter including repainting the hull and touching up paintwork on the superstructure. The engine has had a full service. As soon as the boat is back in the water, training will begin for crew members who did not receive training last year. If you would like to crew the boat this year and have not been contacted already, please contact Edwin Farrar (Tel: 01792 362166)

### **Tonna Workshops.**

A number of work parties have been held at Tonna Workshops since the last Newsletter. The garden area has been cleared and rubbish burned. Part of the Long Shed collapsed and members cleared and stacked the fallen bricks for use in the future. Contractors were brought in to rebuild the gate pillars and hang new gates, repair part of the fence on the towpath boundary and to clear the area at the side of the Workshops, near the river. A new wooden fence has been erected here to prevent access to the river bank.



View of the area which has been cleared and fenced off at the side of the Workshops.

## News (Continued)

### Neath Canal.

Neath Canal Navigation drained the canal below Tonna Lock in late February in order to repair the bottom gates of the lock. Whilst the canal was drained it was noticed that there was a large build-up of silt just below the lock where the stream enters so it was decided to dredge this area before the boating season starts at Easter.



Notice the Footpath Sign and post which has been thrown into the canal at some time. There was also a bike – wheel just visible behind the digger. As well as this digger, a much larger machine was used plus a dumper for moving the silt away. The water from the canal was discharged into the River Neath via the sluice just below the lock. I wonder what happened to all the fish because very little water remained in the canal? It was a good chance to walk the canal to look for obstructions which could damage the engine of the boat. A number of traffic cones were found, plus, just in front of the landing stage near B&Q – a child's pushchair and a shopping trolley. The canal in Neath town centre did have a few pools with about 12 inches of water and I noticed a number of pike enjoying an easy meal, feeding on the smaller fish which were trapped in the pools.

## News (Continued)

The draining of the canal cause a bit of a stir in the local press – this piece appeared in the Evening Post.

### **Maintenance work solves the mystery of 'lost' Neath Canal water**

THE mystery of the missing canal has been solved. Some residents were surprised to wake earlier this week to see the Neath canal, near the town centre, almost empty of any water. Neath resident Mike Swanson got in touch with the Evening Post yesterday to say: “I awoke this morning to find that the Neath canal backing onto my property at Pen y Dre has drained to less than a foot of water. I can’t find any advertised plans to drain it for works, has an incident occurred?” A quick call to the Neath Canal Company revealed that it hadn’t been pinched by a drought-ridden English city or taken as a sample by aliens, but had in fact been purposely drained to allow essential maintenance work on Tonna lock. Bob Minty, manager of the Neath Canal Company, was able to explain the situation. He said: “The canal water level was reduced on the evening of February 29 for the Neath Canal Company to undertake necessary remedial work on Tonna lock and to remove a land slip that had entered the canal preventing boats from sailing upstream of the lock. “It’s hoped that when the work is completed it will build on the success of the sail boat festival, and we are encouraging trail board owners and canoeists to use the canal this summer.” Last month Neath Port Talbot Council’s attempts to boost the number of visitors attracted to the historic canal were given a boost by Welsh tourism minister Suzy Davies. Speaking after it was revealed the council was commissioning a feasibility study into the reopening of the Aberdulais Aqueduct, which used to carry the canal across the River Neath, the minister said: “This is really exciting news. I know there’s a long way to go before we know if the project is viable and if the funding can be found. “But it would increase the length of canal that’s navigable, potentially drawing in a lot more tourists and boosting income for local businesses.” A council spokeswoman said today: “Neath Port Talbot Council has supported various projects helping to maintain and restore structures and sections of these canals because we recognise not only their contribution to tourism but also their amenity value to local residents.”



From the Archives.

This piece appeared in the Aberdare leader in 1947.

*Memories of Neath Canal Revived – Retirement of Mr. Ben Jones, Glynneath.*

*After a period of 53 years in the service of Neath Canal Navigation, Mr Ben Jones, Rockleigh, High Street, Glynneath, announces his retirement. This step has been brought about by indifferent health.*

*He joined the Canal Navigation as a junior clerk early in 1894 when the coal from Aberpergwm Colliery was conveyed by canal barge to Aberpergwm Wharf ( now T.W.Ward's Shipbreaking Yard) at Giant's Grave. At this time between 40 and 50 24 ton barges were in use in the trade. Many of them can be seen derelict and decaying along the old canal today. It will be of great interest to Glynneath people today to learn that a junction canal where Aberpergwm coal was loaded ran from the footbridge over the canal at Aberpergwm Colliery entrance to where the boiler house of the pithead baths now stands. Here a tipper was installed to fill the barges.*

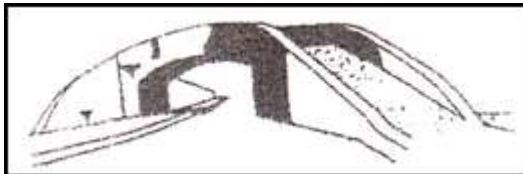
*When the canal coal trade diminished owing to the use of the railway, the canal turned over to carrying explosives from Curtis & Harvey's Works at Pontneathvaughan, bricks and silica from Pontwalby and Abernant Brickworks as well as timber. This change occurred about 1897 and Mr Jones then came to Glynneath in charge of the weigh-bridge near the present-day abattoir.*

*In 1901 Mr Jones opened his boot and shoe retail shop which today is managed by Mr Glyn Jones, his youngest son. In 1911 Mr Jones prevailed upon by his many friends to seek election on the Parochial Council and was elected, serving as a councillor with periods of Chairmanship until 1937, when he became Clerk to the Council and held office until 1945.*

*Mr. Jones is a member of Bethania Chapel and before failing health restricted his activities, did excellent work in connection with the Sunday School and juvenile section of the Chapel.*

*He was a member of Aberpergwm Cricket Team.*

*The many friends of Mr and Mrs Jones and family from Glynneath to Briton Ferry join us in our best wishes for a long and happy retirement.*



## **From the Archives.**

The following is a Neath Canal Navigation report from 1887.

*To the Compnay of Proprietors of the Neath Canal Navigation.*

*Gentlemen.*

*I beg to report that the following work etc has been executed during the past year.*

### **LOCKS.**

*The whole of the Locks (19 in number) have been kept in working order and the necessary repairs attended to. The masonry in all of them has been renovated, repaired and pointed throughout. A new Head Gate with new Balance Pole, Jambs and Sill, complete, has been fitted at the 1<sup>st</sup> Lock. A new Head Gate, with new Balance Pole, Jambs and Sill, complete, has also been fitted at the 18<sup>th</sup>. Lock. A new Balance Pole has been fixed to one of the Lower Gates of the 8<sup>th</sup> lock. The bed of the 16<sup>th</sup>. Lock has been cleared. A new 'Couple' has been fixed at the 13<sup>th</sup>. Lock.*

### **BED OF CANAL**

*The bed has been deepened and cleared at the Canal Head, Maesmarchog, Ynisarwed and Aberdulais.*

### **TOWING PATHS.**

*A length of 3,183 yards has been ballasted and reformed.*

### **AQUEDUCT**

*A great and deplorable calamity occurred on the 10<sup>th</sup> December last at the Aqueduct conveying the Canal over the River Neath. The Aqueduct consists of 6 arches and two of such fell into the river. A temporary channel barrier was erected and the traffic was therefore only suspended for a few days. The Arches have been rebuilt in solid masonry, together with the two piers. In addition to this, the river channel has been cleared and over 7000 tons of deposit removed therefrom. A quantity of 3500 cubic yards of slag filling has also been put under the various arches to protect the pillars and to prevent scour. Weirs (630 feet run) have also been constructed to alter and divert the channel of the river, and in order to distribute the flow of the river evenly through all of the arches. The total cost of the works in labour and material has been serious and amounts to £783-9s-10d. The works were inspected by your Committee in course of construction and after completion.*

### **BRIDGES.**

*The whole of the bridges across the canal (32 in number) have been kept in repair and are in excellent order.*

*FENCES AND GATES.*

*The towing path hedges (10037 yards in length) have been cut, pruned and dressed. Accommodation Gates have been fixed where necessary.*

*BACK CUTS.*

*These have been deepened and cleared through Ynisnedd farm, at Ynisarwed farm and through Criga Farm.*

*BROOKS.*

*Criga Brook has been cleared and pitched. A new oak trunk has been placed under the canal to carry a stream of water near Aberpergwm Wharf.*

*RETAINING BANKS.*

*A breach occurred in the retaining bank against the River Neath at Ynisgerwn and the same has been repaired.*

*SIDE WALLS, FENDERS ETC.*

*New fenders have been fixed at*

*Aberclwyd.....30feet.  
Rheola .....75 feet.  
Ynisbullog .....120 feet.  
Neath.....70 feet.  
Total..... 295 feet in length.*

*The canal wall at the canal Head has been repaired.*

*HOUSES ETC.*

*The cottages and buildings of the Company have been kept in repair.*

*TRAMROAD.*

*The tramroad walls have been rebuilt and the tramway itself has been well kept and is now in good condition throughout.*

*STOCK.*

*The Stock now comprises: Two pairs of Lower Gates; One Head Gate; One Stop Gate; Three Sluices and Frames; Two Head Gates (in hand)*

*STAFF.*

*The present regular staff has been reduced to: One Lock-keeper; Two Carpenters; Two Labourers as against 4 Lock Keepers; 2 Carpenters and 4 Labourers.*

*The Canal has now been brought into such a condition that barring serious and unforeseen accidents the regular work yet to be done can be overtaken and kept in hand with the present small staff.*

*Your obedient servant, Tho. Williams, Clerk & Manager, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1887.*



The Long Shed at Tonna Workshops. This is where the wall collapsed.  
When funding becomes available, the Long Shed will be rebuilt.



The steps and cleared ground in the garden area of the Workshops.



Both canals were in the news earlier in the year when this piece appeared in the Evening Post –

## **Hidden waterway could be reopened if project agreed.**

BOATERS could be exploring miles of Neath's hidden scenery if plans to reopen historic Aberdulais Aqueduct go ahead. Neath Port Talbot Council is bringing in expert consultants to carry out a feasibility study that would allow the authority to apply for funding. The completion of the Ynysbwllog Aqueduct further up the Neath Valley in 2008 meant a 9km stretch of the Neath Canal between Neath town centre and Ynysarwed was navigable for the first time in 50 years. But restoring the aqueduct at Aberdulais means the navigable length, and the scope for tourism, will be dramatically boosted.

Council head of property and regeneration, Gareth Nutt, said: "We have made investment in the network with a view to hopefully getting the Neath Canal navigable from Briton Ferry through to Resolven and Glynneath. The Aberdulais Aqueduct is a key part of that but it also fits in with our tourism strategy, linking the Aberdulais Basin, the National Trust at Aberdulais Falls, the Cefn Coed Coal Museum and the area's industrial heritage." The Aberdulais Aqueduct, which carried the Neath Canal over the river, is owned by the Tennant Canal Company. Its restoration would also provide a link between the Neath and Tennant Canals. Neath Port Talbot councillors have agreed to fund a feasibility study, to be carried out by consultant firm Opus, that would put forward proposals and designs for improvement works to the site. These proposals would then be used as the basis of whatever funding bids the council makes.

"We don't know how much the restoration would cost," said Mr Nutt. "That's something we have asked the consultants to look at." Opus, he added, would consult widely with all interested parties. Council leader Ali Thomas said: "The aqueduct is of huge heritage interest and these improvement works are a key component in the physical regeneration of Neath Port Talbot. The project will act as a springboard to further develop the canal network, connecting the Neath and Tennant Canal. It will also increase the tourism potential of the Dulais Valley."



The landslide on the Neath Canal near Calor Gas. There is quite a large rock under the water in the centre of the canal which will have to be removed before boats can pass.



Heavy plant near the landslide on the Neath Canal.



Members who have been on the Thomas Dadford will be familiar with the souvenirs we have for sale. They all have the Neath & Tennant Canals Trust name printed on them and they are now available for members to buy by post. Prices are –

Shopping Trolley Token Keyring - £0.75

Fridge Magnet - £0.40

Honey Bear - £1.50

Propelling Pencil - £0.50

Pen - £0.60p

Eraser Pencil - £0.20

Photocards - £0.30 each or 4 for £1.00

P&P £0.60

Cheques should be made payable to Neath & Tennant Canals Trust.

Orders should be sent to E.Porter, 35, Alexander Road, Rhyddings, Neath, SA10 8EF

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

**Chairman:** Dr. Gareth Hughes

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**Boat Co-ordinator:** Edwin Farrar

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**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:

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