

Ymddiriedolaeth Camlesi Nedd a Thennant.



Neath and Tennant Canals Trust

Newsletter

June 2019 – No. 153



Skew Bridge. Aberdulais Basin, disappearing under ivy and saplings.

Important Notice.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

to be held at

Lock House (British Legion), Aberdulais
on

Tuesday 30th. July 2019.

at 7.30 p.m.

AGENDA.

1. Apologies.
2. Minutes of A.G.M. – Tuesday 24th. July 2018
3. Matters Arising.
4. Chairman's Report.
5. Presentation of Accounts.
6. Election of President.
7. Election of Council of Management Members – Margaret Gwalter, Ian Milne and Edward Porter retire on rotation.

Please send any nominations to the General Secretary, Mr. Ian Milne, 16, Gower Road, Sketty, Swansea, SA2 9BY to arrive at least 21 days before the date of the AGM.

8. Socialising

Trust News.

Neath Canal - People have been complaining about the build-up of rubbish in the Neath Canal at Bridge Street. There is a grid on the up-stream side of the low bridge and this is not cleared as regularly as it should. When I visited the site in mid June it was quite clear but there was a pile of rotting vegetation on the side of the canal.



Elsewhere on the Neath Canal there are a number of fallen trees and large branches in the canal and there is evidence that attempts have been made to remove them just above Aberdulais Basin. In the Basin itself, a large tree has been dragged out of the water along with numerous branches.

Tennant Canal – Pumps are in operation again at Aberdulais, behind the British Legion, because of the problems with the normal water supply from the River Neath.

Canal Talks – Mike Jones continues to give talks to various clubs and organisations in the area.

Website – Talks are ongoing with various people regarding the production of a new website.

Newsletter – Due to increased postal costs, the Newsletter will now be published twice a year – June and December.

A Walk along the Tennant Canal – April 2019.

It was a lovely sunny early Spring afternoon when I went for a leisurely stroll between 2 and 5.30 along the Tennant Canal between Jersey Marine and Neath Abbey. My objective was to discover what bird life might be seen along this wide stretch of the Canal and I was pleasantly surprised as I managed to spot 30 species.

I started by crossing the well preserved board walk in Pantysais Fen National Nature Reserve. Few Spring migrants had arrived so the Fen was quite quiet. A Raven flew over croaking, several Buzzards were mewing and circling and Lesser Black Backed and Herring Gulls patrolled over the village.

The board walk leads directly onto the Tennant Canal. The towpath was slightly muddy but easily walkable. I could hear the traffic on the M4 in the distance but this was soon forgotten walking by this tranquil waterway. Willow Warblers had arrived from Africa and several were calling on the opposite bank. A Green Woodpecker yaffled in the distance. Great Tits and Blue Tits were busy feeding in the adjacent willows, birches and alders. Suddenly a Moorhen clattered away across to the far bank.

After ducking beneath the two railway bridges the Canal skirts close to the Fen and past a pump house extracting water. The Fen produced Grey Heron, Mallard, several Wrens, Blackbirds, Robins and a single Song Thrush. Then a great unusual spot right by the towpath. **Cetti's Warblers are usually only heard but a** moving reed produced a two second sighting of this unobtrusive, skulking bird. I heard the explosive call of this species at least 3 more times showing it is plentiful in the Fen.

Just after crossing the overflow which runs from the Canal into the tidal Red Jacket Pill, there was a myriad of birdsong along the banks. A great spot was a Lesser Redpoll in the willows and a nearby male Blackcap singing its melodious song to attract a mate.

And then, right underneath the M4, with traffic rumbling along above, one of my favourite birds, a Grey Wagtail hunting for insects along the fringes of the Canal quite oblivious to the thousands of cars and lorries above it.

Just beyond is a total contrast to the M4, aloft on giant pillars. An old canal accommodation bridge now leading to a derelict pumping station. Nearby a Goldcrest was fluttering round a willow, insect hunting and a Reed Bunting was visible calling from a birch tree. Suddenly a great commotion from the Canal surface as a Cormorant took off, its fishing disturbed by my presence.

Other birds seen on my walk included Black Headed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Collared

Dove, Pied Wagtail, Nuthatch, Magpie, Jackdaw and Chaffinch. There were plenty of butterflies too, peacocks, red admirals and brimstones.

I have in the past seen Kingfisher on this stretch of the Tennant but sadly not on this occasion.

In 3 hours of walking I saw only 3 other people, a cyclist, a walker and a runner, leaving the birds to enjoy this undisturbed length of the Tennant Canal. You could imagine you were still back in 1824 when the cut was built.

Ian Milne.

Neath Canal – Towpath Work.

Construction work has finished on phase two of the Neath Canal Towpath Active Travel Route which now completes a series of improvements from Bridge Street, Neath to Briton Ferry. The scheme has improved the surface, appearance and accessibility of the National Cycle Network (NCN 47) alongside Neath Canal that will encourage active travel through walking and cycling for everyday short distance journeys within the county borough. The scheme was constructed by Alun Griffiths (Contractors) Ltd and has been funded by the Welsh Government's Active Travel Fund. A spokesman from Neath Port Talbot CBC stated that 'the Neath Canal towpath is an attractive place in which to walk and cycle and we hope the improvements will lead to many more users for this route.'

(Source – South Wales Evening Post – June 2019)



Early Canals in Glamorgan.

A lot has been written about the South Wales Canals over the years and I recently came across an article by Thomas Bevan in Volume 2 of the Glamorgan Historian published in 1965.

There is evidence that as long ago as 1563 a Glamorgan engineer named John Trew went to Exeter to help solve the problem of mud/silt in the estuary of the Exe. He began experimenting with a lock to capture the incoming tide and enclosed a calm stretch of water by which ships could side-track the sandbanks and proceed up river without further hindrance. This was a success and he was appointed engineer to the Exeter Canal. The estuary of the River Neath presented very much the same difficulties as that of the Exe and there are records of similar experiments being made to improve navigation in order to reach iron and copper works established at an early date in the Neath area. Before 1690 a side passage had been cut near an old iron works at Aberdulais a mile or so above the town. It ran parallel with the river for a short distance and had a lock at each end to enclose a small basin where ships could discharge ores brought up the river from Cornwall and Cardigan. About this time Sir Humphrey Mackworth came to Neath and married Mary, daughter of Sir Herbert Evans of the Gnoll, whose family were pioneers of coal-mining in the valley. Sir Humphrey had established a copper-smelting plant near the mouth of the river about a mile below the town and was looking for a way to bring coal from his father-in-law's mines to the new furnaces near Melin Cryddan. At first he experimented with land transport and adopted the unusual idea of attaching sails to wagons running over wooden rails along the road. According to a contemporary writer 'his sailing-wagons were the wonder of the world and the praise of poets, one horse doing the work of ten and if the wind was good, even twenty.' To get ore by ship to his works he cut a passage 300 yards long and 20 feet wide and, with a pair of gates, held the tide in a small water-bay where ships of 100 tons could come within 400 feet of his furnaces. This channel afterwards claimed the title of a canal - the Mackworth, and some years later became incorporated in the main scheme for the Vale of Neath. In 1790, another landlord and pioneer coal owner, Lord Vernon, cut an extension from a creek in the river known as Giant's Grave. It was over a mile long and could bring ships carrying ores from France, Cornwall, Cardigan and Anglesey within easy reach of the many furnaces in the district. This channel also gained the name of a canal, the Penrhiwtyn and was similarly absorbed in the major waterway of the valley.

In a recent guide to Neath (May 2019) and distributed to households in the Neath area, a street map in the centre of the booklet shows the Neath Canal but the stretch in Briton Ferry is named - Jersey Canal.



A very overgrown Skew Bridge at Aberdulais Basin.



**Neath and Tennant Canals Trust.
Council of Management 2018 – 2019.**

Chairman: Dr. Gareth Hughes

Vice-Chairman: Malcolm Smith

General Secretary: Ian Milne Tel: 01792 547902

Company Secretary – Margaret Gwalter

Treasurer: Vacant

Membership Secretary: Vacant

Publicity & Website: Martyn Lyddon

Newsletter Editor: Ted Porter.

Work Party Organiser: Malcolm Smith

Archivist: Peter Ricketts MBE

Other C.O.M. Members: 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. June,
December.