



Newsletter

Issue 392

May 2005

Chairman's Column

May Speaker

It is with great pleasure that the Society welcomes Dennis Bright for a return visit to one of our meetings. On this occasion Dennis will be presenting 'Valley of the Barn Owls'.

Waterways Diary

In each issue of our Newsletter, Peter Oates publishes the 'Waterways Diary' with details of the many waterways events taking place in our region. I understand that this diary is now so popular, many other waterways societies regularly use it as the definitive guide to such activities. If you are at a loss as to where to visit from time to time, just take a quick glance at the 'Waterways Diary' and I am sure there will be something advertised to satisfy most interests.

Mary Hill

At last month's meeting I learnt that our member Mary Hill hadn't been at all well and was in hospital. A 'Get Well' card was sent to Mary on behalf of the Society.

Gill Herbert

Gill wants to thank the Society and her colleagues for the many 'Get Well' wishes she received following her foot operation last month. She is now up on her feet (literally) and will soon be looking for volunteers to assist with refreshments at future meetings. You have been warned!



Paul Herbert

David Hutchings

We are deeply saddened to report the death, on 23rd April, of David Hutchings, who had suffered from Parkinson's Disease for many years. David was an IWA vice president, an active member of the Association for fifty years, and widely acknowledged as probably the most influential waterway restorer of his generation. He was perhaps best-known for leading the restoration of the southern Stratford-upon-Avon Canal culminating in its re-opening by HM The Queen Mother at the 1964 IWA National Rally held on the Avon at Stratford, which he also masterminded.

David Hutchings became active in 1955 in the Association's then Midlands Branch, taking a leading role in opposing then the British Transport Commission's plans for waterway closures. In 1957, he took on the running of the highly successful National Rally, moved to Coventry at short notice. Following internal disagreements within the Association in 1958, he was left to head the Midlands Branch and soon became involved in the campaign to save the Southern Stratford-upon-Avon Canal.

When the National Trust took over the canal in 1960, David Hutchings agreed to manage its restoration, and eventually gave up his job as an

architect to attend to the canal full-time. After the re-opening of the canal in 1964, initially returning to pursue his career in architecture, he was eventually persuaded to take on the role of manager of the restoration of the Upper Avon Navigation in 1965.

After reopening of the Navigation in 1974, again by HM The Queen Mother, Hutchings became full-time manager of the Navigation, running it in a highly efficient manner, with surplus funds to invest in improvements and to lobby for restoration of the Higher Avon to Warwick - an ambition frustrated by landowners and conservationists who wished to keep the river private despite the clear success of the reopenings downstream.

David Hutchings was widely regarded as a hero and a living legend by many of the early activists within Waterway Recovery Group, as well as within the Association. He frequently inspired volunteers to achieve feats far greater than they thought themselves capable of, and his bold engineering solutions found many admirers. His family requested a funeral for relatives and close friends only, but there may be a service of remembrance at a later date.

April Meeting The Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Trust - Cliff Penny

The Society can justifiably claim that it has, by tradition, always produced an interesting programme of speakers and the speaker at our April meeting, Cliff Penny of the Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Trust, certainly upheld that tradition. Cliff gave us a most interesting evening, particularly so as few of us knew much about the H & G Canal and we were eager to learn everything we could about this 'long lost' waterway.



Cliff took us through the early days of the canal, its planning, construction, relatively short period of actual operation, and its final demise, with much of the route being converted into a railway.

This canal was one of the last to be fully opened, with the final section to Hereford

Basin opening in 1845, but it was also one of the earliest to be closed, in 1889 when it succumbed to railway competition. Work on the construction of the H&G started at Over, Gloucester in 1793, at its junction with the River Severn, at the height of 'canal mania'. The main line of the canal was 34 miles with 22 narrow locks, and three tunnels, the longest being Oxenhall at 2192 yds. There was a short branch, the Oxenhall Coal Branch, but that was already disused by 1800.

The canal was never the commercial success the promoters had hoped. It was soon under threat from the railways and its fate was clear as soon as the Hereford-Worcester railway opened in 1861; it ran via Ledbury and brought stiff competition for trade. In 1863 the canal was leased to the Great Western Railway whose plan was to close it and use the Ledbury to Gloucester route on which to build a railway. In the event, the GWR continued to operate the canal for a time but 1880 saw the last complete year of business on the canal and the first section closed the following year.

The Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal Society was formed in 1963 and became a Trust in 1992, since which time restoration work has accelerated. The Trust is working to achieve complete restoration of the canal – an ambitious but achievable goal. Although much of the canal has been filled in and in places has disappeared without trace, a surprising number of lock cottages, wharf buildings and bridges can still be seen. Working with the Waterway Recovery Group, the original canal basin and lock at Over, where the canal connected with the River Severn, has been reconstructed. Restoration work continues apace at various locations along the route.

The Trust, which currently has 1,200 members, had a turnover of £50,000 last year, plus an additional £40,000 from an associated company. The Trust has

gained national recognition of its success in working in partnership with developers and local authorities in order to secure the future of the restoration for the whole community. To ensure the line of the canal is not obstructed in the future, the entire canal corridor is protected in the various Local Authority Plans. The Trust even has a good liaison with English Nature!

Cliff showed us many interesting slides which illustrated the beautiful countryside through which much of the canal runs. We saw shots of the canal in total dereliction and many of completed reconstruction works and others of 'work in progress'. Of particular interest were 'before and after' scenes.

Cliff described many of the challenges that had been overcome, also highlighting those still ahead. Of particular importance was the Trust's good relationship with the local authorities along the route and with potential developers. Cliff spent some time explaining the major works which had had to be undertaken at Over, following the closure of the former hospital on that site and its subsequent development with high quality housing. First, the original line of the filled in



Over Basin, late summer 2002

canal, its basin, and link with the River Severn, had to be traced before excavation and rebuilding could be started. The finished project, showing the excellent quality of workmanship, with the basin in water, demonstrates the drive and organisation behind the Trust.

At the end of Cliff's presentation there followed a very good question and answer session.

Many thanks Cliff for providing us with a very informative and interesting evening. Good luck to you and your colleagues in the Trust for the eventual restoration and reopening of the whole canal.

Paul Herbert

(For those with access to the Internet, for more information about the Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal and the Trust, including location maps and photographs, go to www.h-g-canal.org.uk).

WATERWAYS DIARY

The following is a list of waterway events taking place within approximately 50 miles of Southampton. Hopefully you can find something to interest you.

Whilst every effort is made to ensure the correctness of this information, please check with the listed contact who will be glad to supply further details of that event. If YOU know of an event taking place that should be in this list then contact the editor.

Time	Organiser	Details	Contact
Thu 12 May 2005 7.45pm	Southampton CS	'Valley of the Barn Owls' by Dennis Bright. Please note that this date is the 2nd Thursday of the month. Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton.	Eric Lewis: 023 8086 0384
Sun 15 May 2005	Kennet & Avon CT	Guided walk along the Somerset Coal Canal. This will include access to the Caisson lock and other areas not normally open to the public. Group transport to start point. Finish with a pub lunch.	Roger Hollands: 01249 650952
Thu 19 May 2005 7.30pm	IWA Salisbury Group	'Southampton & Salisbury Canal'. History and pictures of this local canal with Peter Oates. The Green Dragon, Alderbury, near Salisbury, Wilts	Jon Van de Geer: 01722 412841 or Ron & Myra Glover 01722 710322 Email: ronmyra.glover@virgin.net
Sun 22 May 2005	IWA Salisbury Group	Visiting sites on the Southampton & Salisbury Canal by car and a walk along some of the remaining canal with Peter Oates. Followed by lunch at the Green Dragon, Alderbury, Wilts.	Jon Van de Geer: 01722 412841 or Ron & Myra Glover 01722 710322 Email: ronmyra.glover@virgin.net
Sun 22 May 2005	Wey & Arun CT and IWA Solent & Arun Branch	Small Boat Rally. From the Onslow Arms at Loxwood, on the B2133 north-west of Billingshurst, to and over the new Drungewick Aqueduct. A one-day event - but boats wishing to stay on the canal for the weekend should contact WACT.	WACT: 01403 752403 Email: wact@weyandarun.freeserve.co.uk or Peter Boyce: 023 9226 9642 Email: pete@greensleeves.freeserve.co.uk
Sat 28 - Sun 29 May 2005	Basingstoke Canal Boat Club	Boat Club Gathering at Colt Hill Wharf, Odiham.	Tel: 01252 663674
Thu 2 Jun 2005 7.45pm	Southampton CS	'A Day in the Life of a Thames Tug' with Richard Thomas. Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton.	Eric Lewis: 023 8086 0384
Sat 4 Jun 2005	IWA Solent & Arun Branch	Langstone & Chichester Harbours - Bullion Run along the barge route from Portsmouth. Delivery of restoration funds: Portsmouth to Salterns Lock.	Peter Boyce: 023 9226 9642 Email: pete@greensleeves.freeserve.co.uk
Sun 5 Jun 2005 10.30am for 11.00am start	IWA Solent & Arun Branch	Chichester Ship Canal - from Salterns lock to Chichester Canal Basin. Bullion run part two. To navigate and portage the complete length of the Canal from the harbour to the city basin. About 2 hours duration.	Peter Boyce: 023 9226 9642 Email: pete@greensleeves.freeserve.co.uk
Sun 12 Jun 2005	Wey & Arun CT	Puddle 05 - Sponsored walk on and near Wey & Arun Canal.	WACT: 01403 752403 Email: wact@weyandarun.freeserve.co.uk
Tue 14 Jun 2005 8.00pm	Somersetshire Coal CS	Illustrated talk - "William Smith and the Batheaston Coal Mine" by Daniel Brown. Radstock Museum, Waterloo Rd, Radstock. Follows Canal Society AGM.	Mike Chapman: 01225 426948. Email: mike@chapman76.fsnet.co.uk
Sun 19 Jun 2005 10.00am	Somersetshire Coal CS	Walk - The area around Fuller's Earth Works. Meet at Odd Down Park and Ride.	Mike Chapman: 01225 426948. Email: mike@chapman76.fsnet.co.uk
Sun 25 Jun 2005 11.00am - 5.00pm	Reading Borough Council/Kennet & Avon CT	Reading Water Fest. On the Kennet, Abbey Ruins, Riverside Museum.	Jo Keen: 0118 939 0373
Sat 2 Jul 2005 12.00 - 6.00pm	National Trust	Guildford Boat Gathering on River Wey at Millmead, Guildford. Admission free.	Tel: 01483 561389 Email: riverwey@nationaltrust.org.uk
Thu 7 Jul 2005 7.45pm	Southampton CS	"The Itchen Navigation Project" by Leah Mathias. Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton.	Eric Lewis: 023 8086 0384
Sat 9 Jul 2005	IWA Solent & Arun Branch	River Adur, Shoreham to Upper Beeding and back. A cruise to campaign for the retention and provision of public slipway access to the River Adur at Shoreham. Launch by 12:00 with 4 hours on the water.	Peter Boyce: 023 9226 9642 Email: pete@greensleeves.freeserve.co.uk
Fri 15 Jul 2005	Wey & Arun CT	Mikron Theatre at Fishers Park, Wisborough Green, West Sussex.	WACT: 01403 752403 Email: wact@weyandarun.freeserve.co.uk
Sat 16 Jul 2005	Wey & Arun CT	Haybarn Bridge re-opening.	WACT: 01403 752403 Email: wact@weyandarun.freeserve.co.uk
Sun 17 Jul 2005 7.30pm		Mikron Theatre Company. 'Wheel of Fortune' - story of the Falkirk Wheel. Fox & Hounds, Crookham Road, Fleet.	
Thu 21 Jul 2005 7.00pm	IWA Salisbury Group	Boules and BBQ at The Green Dragon, Alderbury, near Salisbury, Wilts.	Jon Van de Geer: 01722 412841 or Ron & Myra Glover 01722 710322 Email: ronmyra.glover@virgin.net
Thu 28 Jul 2005 7.45pm	Southampton CS	AGM and Waterway Videos. Please note that this is the "August" meeting. Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton.	Eric Lewis: 023 8086 0384
31 Jul 2005	Kennet & Avon CT	Newbury Water Festival, Victoria Park, Newbury.	Jane Elwell: 01635 569647
Sun 7 Aug 2005 11.00am	IWA Solent & Arun Branch	River Itchen at Winchester. A cruise on the top pound of the Itchen Navigation for unpowered and electric powered boats. Launch over bank at Tun Bridge.	Peter Boyce: 023 9226 9642 Email: pete@greensleeves.freeserve.co.uk
Sat 27 - Sun 28 Aug 2005	Basingstoke Canal Boat Club	Fox and Hounds Boat Rally at Fleet.	Tel: 01252 663674

Continued on page 4

Waterways Diary 2005 *(continued from page 3)*

Time	Organiser	Details	Contact
Thu 1 Sept 2005 7.45pm	Southampton CS	'The Work of the Upper Severn Trust' with Jeremy Coles. Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton.	Eric Lewis: 023 8086 0384
Thu 8 Sept 2005 7.30pm - 9.00pm	Basingstoke Canal Authority	Guided bat walk. Canal Ranger Paul Hope will give a talk about bats at the outset then lead the group on a guided walk. There will be a limited number of bat detectors for you to use. Booking essential - £3 per person.	Tel: 01252 370073
Thu 15 Sept 2005 7.30pm	IWA Salisbury Group	'The Caldon Canal'. Talk and video with Tony Fry. The Green Dragon, Alderbury, near Salisbury, Wilts	Jon Van de Geer: 01722 412841 or Ron & Myra Glover 01722 710322 Email: ronmyra.glover@virgin.net
Fri 16 - Sun 25 Sept 2005	British Marine Federation	Southampton Boat Show.	Tel: 01784 223600
Sat 17 - Sun 18 Sept 2005	Basingstoke Canal Boat Club	Boat Club Moving Rally. Narrowboats, cruisers, steam boats and more will cruise together between Frimley and Odiham as part of a spectacular moving boat rally.	Tel: 01252 663674
Sun 18 Sept 2005	IWA Solent & Arun Branch	River Hamble: Swanwick to Curbridge & Botley. Cruise to celebrate the completion of the Bark Store restoration at Botley, and its use as a canoe and boat club centre for the Upper Hamble. Launch Warsash 10.00am, Swanwick 11.00am, out by 6.00pm	Peter Boyce: 023 9226 9642 Email: pete@greensleeves.freeserve.co.uk
Thu 13 Oct 2005 7.45pm	Southampton CS	'So you think you know about Industrial Archaeology?' with John Silman and Tony Yoward. NB: this date is the 2nd Thursday of the month. Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton.	Eric Lewis: 023 8086 0384
Thu 3 Nov 2005 7.45pm	Southampton CS	'South Coast Circular Cruise' by James Griffin. Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton.	Eric Lewis: 023 8086 0384
Thu 17 Nov 2005 7.30pm	IWA Salisbury Group	'Lots to do at the Soo'. A look at some North American waterways with Colin Ward. The Green Dragon, Alderbury, near Salisbury, Wilts.	Jon Van de Geer: 01722 412841 or Ron & Myra Glover 01722 710322 Email: ronmyra.glover@virgin.net
Thu 1 Dec 2005 7.45pm	Southampton CS	Inter-Society Waterways Quiz and American Supper. Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton.	Eric Lewis: 023 8086 0384
Every Sun, Wed & Bank Hol 25 Mar to 30 Oct 2005	Kennet & Avon CT	Claverton Pumping Station. Open 10.00am - 5.00pm (Weds 4.00pm). Pumping days: 27-28 Mar, 24 Apr, 2 May, 29-30 May, 25-26 Jun, 23-24 Jul, 28-29 Aug, 25 Sep, 23 Oct. Admission: Pumping days: £3 Static days: £2	Tel: 01225 483001. Email: enquiries@claverton.org Web: www.claverton.org/
Every day 25 Mar to 2 Oct 2005	Kennet & Avon CT	Crofton Pumping Station. Open 10.00am - 5.00pm. See below for Steaming Days. Admission: Adults £3.00, Seniors £2.50, Children £1.00 (under 5 free), Families (2 adults & 2 children) £7.00	Tel: 01672 870300. Email: eq05ntz9@CroftonBeamEngines.org Web: www.croftonbeamengines.org/
Mar to Oct 2005	Kennet & Avon CT	Crofton Pumping Station Steaming Days on 26-28 Mar, 30 Apr - 2 May, 28-30 May, 25-26 Jun, 30-31 Jul, 27-29 Aug, 1-2 Oct 2005 (10.30am - 5.00pm). Adults £4.50, Seniors £3.50, Children £1.00 (under 5 free), Families (2 adults, 2 children) £10.00.	Tel: 01672 870300. Email: eq05ntz9@CroftonBeamEngines.org Web: www.croftonbeamengines.org/
1 May - 31 Jul 2005	Museum of Bath at Work	Somersetshire Coal Canal Exhibition within the Museum, Julian Road, Bath. To celebrate the 200th anniversary of the official opening of the Combe Hay flight of locks. Open 10.00am to 4.00pm 7 days a week - adult: £4.00, concessions: £3.00, family (2 adults, 2 children): £10.00.	Museum: 01225 318348. Web: www.bath-at-work.org.uk

Red Diesel

The Inland Waterways Association would like to gain a clearer picture of how an increase of around 60p per litre in the price of diesel fuel (the likely effect of the withdrawal of red diesel from marine use) might affect inland waterways users. A questionnaire has been inserted in a random sample of 5,000 copies of IWA's members' magazine Waterways, and is also available at IWA's Web site in an interactive form at www.waterways.org.uk/reddiesel.asp

The IWA would be grateful for waterway users to spend a few moments answering the questions; the answers from which we hope will also be useful in convincing politicians and civil servants of our case to retain the current derogation. The questionnaire has been devised in co-operation with the RYA, which is compiling similar information for offshore marine users and British Marine Federation, which is assisting with detailed information from the trade.

New BW Chairman



Tony Hales has been appointed as the new chairman of British Waterways in succession to Dr George Greener, who retires on 9th July. Tony Hales, aged 56, will take over his responsibilities from 10th July, for a three-year period. He is currently chairman of Workspace Group plc, a provider of small business space in London and the South East. He was previously chief executive of Allied Domecq and a non-executive director of HSBC Bank plc, and Welsh Water plc.

Stroudwater Navigation

On 13th April, The Company of Proprietors of the Stroudwater Navigation, one of the oldest canal companies in Britain, signed a 999-year lease of the Navigation to British Waterways. The new lease represents an important step in the restoration of the Cotswold Canals, comprising the Stroudwater Navigation and the Thames & Severn Canal, which was sold off to a variety of neighbouring landowners following closure.

In July 2004, the restoration of the Cotswold Canals benefited from a Heritage Lottery Fund Stage One Pass for its bid for a £11.3 million grant towards the first major phase of restoration work, which would cover most of the Stroudwater Navigation. The bid, made by BW on behalf of the Cotswold Canals Partnership, seeks just under half the funding for the conservation-led restoration of a six-mile stretch of canal from The Ocean at Stonehouse on the Stroudwater Navigation in the west to Brimscombe Port on the Thames & Severn Canal east of Stroud.

Further work to complete the planning of the project and to secure formal commitments for the remaining match funding is underway. In February 2005, The South West of England Regional Development Agency awarded British Waterways, on behalf of the Partnership, £325,000 towards feasibility studies for the first phase of the restoration, plus a further £250,000 towards creating a master plan framework to progress the regeneration of parts of Stroud along the canal corridor. British Waterways plans to submit its second stage bid to Heritage Lottery Fund in August 2005 and hopes to be able to start construction work early in 2006.

The Company of Proprietors has been in continuous existence since its formation in 1776 under the third of three acts of Parliament that allowed construction of the Navigation. The Act stipulates the number of Directors permitted (10), and the number of shares allowed (200). A majority of shares are held by trustees to be used 'for the benefit of the people of Stroud and the surrounding area.' The Company remains in existence and continues to be active in the preservation and promotion of its historic connections.

The Stroudwater Navigation was highly profitable until the arrival of the Grand Western Railway at Stroud and Gloucester in 1845. Locks were widened in 1859 to allow a steam barge to Ryeford Mill, but when the Stonehouse and Nailsworth Railway (later the Midland) gained its Act in 1863, the waterway's fate was sealed, and it finally closed in 1954, the last boat having delivered coal to Stroud gas works in 1941.

*Articles on pages 5 & 6 taken from
IWA Head Office Bulletin - May 2005*

Thames & Severn Canal

Jack Russell, the Gloucester & England cricketer and artist, formally opened Spine Road Bridge on 30th April. Within a popular walking area, and located next to the entrance to the Cotswold Water Park, the new bridge enables pedestrians and cyclists to cross the road safely on the towpath, along the line of the original canal. Animal tunnels have been provided so that even the local wildlife can get to the other side of the road safely!

Although the main structure of the Spine Road Bridge, which marks an important step towards the full restoration of the Cotswold Canals, was completed some months ago, a formal opening has been delayed whilst the distinctive bulrush parapets were fitted and work in the vicinity of the bridge completed.

The £500,000 project was project managed by British Waterways on behalf of the Cotswold Canals Partnership. Funding partners included the Countryside Agency's Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire County Councils, The Cotswold Canals Trust, The Inland Waterways Association, Hills Minerals & Waste Limited (through the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme), the Medlock Charitable Trust and 28 other charitable trusts and private sector firms which responded to an appeal by the Cotswold Canals Trust.

Ashton Canal

Officers from IWA's Manchester Branch and North West Region have recently had a constructive meeting with Greater Manchester Police about incidents along the Ashton Canal. Further meetings are planned to take place every few months.

Greater Manchester Police takes note of all calls received about the Ashton Canal and they are recorded for reference purposes and to see if there is a pattern to the behaviour. The Police wish to know of all incidents (in the same way that British Waterways does) but the Police may not be able to attend while the incident is taking place.

Anyone who has a problem should telephone 0161 872 5050 or 999 and state exactly where the incident is occurring and give an accurate description of what is happening.

Greater Manchester Police has made available a statement concerning its grading of calls and response policy, and a copy of this document is available from the Manchester Branch pages of IWA's web site at:

www.waterways.org.uk/branch_new/manchester/index.htm

SOUTHAMPTON CANAL SOCIETY

Established 1967

The objectives of the Society are to foster interest in canals and inland waterways, to assist in their preservation, restoration and development, and to give practical help on waterway projects.

Meetings:

Normally 1st Thursday each month at 7.45pm.
Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton.

President:

Brian Evans.

Chairman:

Paul Herbert, 25 Rosemoor Grove, Chandler's Ford,
Hampshire, SO53 1TB. Tel: 023 8026 2365.
Email: paul@herbertpaul.wanadoo.co.uk

Secretary:

Eric Lewis, 51 Friars Croft, Calmore, Southampton,
SO40 2SS. Tel: 023 8086 0384
E-mail: sue.eric.lewis@ukonline.co.uk

Treasurer & Membership Secretary:

Laura Sturrock, 27 Northlands Road, Romsey, Hampshire,
SO51 5RU. Tel 01794 517614
Email: laura@whitenap.plus.com

Committee:

Martin Cripps,
Peter Oates,
Paul Taylor,
David Townley-Jones

Newsletter Editor & Webmaster:

Peter Oates, 27 Northlands Road, Romsey, Hampshire,
SO51 5RU. Tel 01794 517614
Email: peter@whitenap.plus.com

Society Website:

<http://www.whitenap.plus.com>

Wey & Arun Canal

Chichester District Council has granted planning permission for the restoration of the canal crossing at Loxwood. After the canal fell into disuse in the 1870s the traditional hump back bridge was removed so that boats could no longer pass underneath the busy road (today the B2133 Guildford Road) next to the Onslow Arms pub. The Canal Trust consulted local residents at all stages and in order to minimise disruption have decided on a plan that will not involve raising the road. Instead, there is a plan to lower the level of the canal on both sides of the road by building a new lock on the west side. This new lock will be the first completely new lock to be built by the Trust..

Preparatory work started immediately after the end of the Trust's popular Easter Bunny cruises. The public boat trips on the 2-mile length of the canal will continue on weekend afternoons throughout this summer. The boat Zachariah Keppel is also available for charter.

Gloucester & Sharpness Canal

On the weekend of 16th - 17th April, Llanthony Bridge failed and the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal was closed to navigation at this point until emergency repairs could be put in place. British Waterways ran tests on the bridge and a fault in one of the pins holding the bridge hydraulics in place was discovered. New pins were ordered, and the bridge was rectified to a point where it could be lifted six times each day over the period 30th April to 2nd May.

Rochdale Canal

A major breach to the canal embankment near the river Irk Aqueduct occurred on the Rochdale Canal, between Locks 63 - 64, near Middleton, on 24th April. The embankment slipped, causing extensive damage to the canal and the aqueduct. British Waterways' engineers are investigating the cause of the slippage and the options to repair and reinstate the embankment.

A large quantity of material was washed into the river Irk. The site was secured and has been closed off to public access along the drained sections of the canal between locks 63 to 64. Low dams were constructed within the canal to facilitate pumping to maintain a flow to pounds downstream. A fish rescue was also undertaken with assistance from the Environment Agency.

The canal navigation and towpath remains closed between locks 63 and 64; there are winding points are below lock 50 to the east and below lock 83 to the west. Summit passages can still be booked via British Waterways' Warrington office. However, passages from locks 83 to 65 are not currently available due to the limited water supplies below the breach site.

This part of the canal was one of the earlier restored sections, and was in water for many years as an isolated stretch. The trip boat, 'River Irk' ran here, long before the Millennium Lottery Fund grant and associated funding enabled the canal to be restored.

The scale of the breach is such that work to remedy it is likely to cost hundreds of thousands of pounds, depending on the stability of neighbouring sections of the embankment. At present, a budget is not available for this work, and the canal is likely to remain closed at this point until at least the end of 2005.

It was only on the 22nd March that the canal was reopened to navigation after a lengthy stoppage following problems with a culvert passing under an embankment near Slattocks between Locks 59 and 60. In this case, there were difficulties gaining access from the adjoining landowner's property.