

Calder Navigation Society
Newsletter July 2025



In many ways, 2025 is proving to be a truly ‘Annus Horribilis’ for the Northern Waterways….and there is more doom and despondency to read about in the following pages. On the other hand, the weather has been good, if a little dry, Savile sails on and CNS continues work to brighten up the Calder & Hebble. More on all of this later but whatever the problems, new life is to be found all along the Navigation.





Chairpersons Remarks – John Smith

Welcome to the July edition of our Newsletter. I'd like to start by paying tribute to our special friend Chris Etwell who sadly passed away in June. A true gentleman, friend of all and gifted engineer who contributed so much to our Society as a Committee Member, skipper on Savile, and playing a major part in her maintenance over the years. His masterful control of Savile when at the helm allowed him to perform the closet thing I have ever seen to a "handbrake turn" with a canal boat. Our thoughts go out to Tina and family.

Moving on to something more positive, let's look at the current state of our waterways. Erm, well, this could be a short paragraph. Whilst sun lovers are enjoying the heat and dry weather, it is taking its' toll on our waterways. The Huddersfield Narrow and Huddersfield Broad Canals, and the Rochdale Canal and the Leeds Liverpool Canal are all closed due to lack of water. There is no trans-Pennine canal open currently and, even if it rains, we are warned of no sign of improvement in the near future. Right, let's go to Plan B. What about escaping for a summer cruise down the Trent? The railway bridge at Keadby can only be opened when the air temperature below the bridge is less than 15 deg C! Some fellow boaters from South Pennine Boat Club have ventured out that way but had get up in the very early hours of the morning (between 1:30 to 4:00am!) to get through. Not the most practical route.



All is not bad though. Being on a navigation our waterway is river fed, and though we are subject to flooding in inclement weather, we are also blessed by its' resilience in these times of drought allowing us to venture further afield. As I write this article, we are moored on the Old Coal Staithe at Allerton Bywater on the Aire and Calder and have been "Living the dream" (ref our Editor's article later in this issue) having previously made it up to Granary Wharf in Leeds for the weekend.





En-route we witnessed the new commercial transport of sand by the George Dyson from Stanley Ferry to Fleet Bridge. It is encouraging to see our waterways being used again as intended, transporting heavy goods by water. It is taking so many trucks off our roads.

We were delighted to see a variety of wildlife with ducks, swans, herons, the odd cormorant, grebe and kingfisher, one solitary egret, pretty blue damsel flies and enormous dragonflies that looked like they could tear your arm off if you challenged them. Beauty to be experienced by all from waterway or towpath alike.

On a short cruise in June to Sowerby Bridge, we stumbled upon the newly re-opened Colliers Arms and are pleased to welcome back this popular canal side hostelry and its canal loving managers.

Savile Cruises remain a major contributor to our funding and the 40's weekend at Brighouse was particularly successful. Thanks are due to all the volunteer crew, both on-board and on shore for their support, making it a great weekend.

Further thanks are due to the volunteers who devoted many hours of their time to renovating Thornhill Double Locks. If anyone else can lend a hand it would be most welcome. See further article in this newsletter and contact Peter Davies for details. Maintaining the beauty of the canal structures is key to keeping interest in the network which is suffering due to lack of funds.

Canals and boats always attract attention, so let's keep lobbying the Government to recognise this with their funding. CNS is one of the organisations supporting the "Fund Britain's Waterways" campaign trying to get the message through. It's the fascination with boats moving that gets people out there.

We must not forget however that we are a Society founded to promote enjoyment of the waterways for all, walkers, joggers, cyclists, fishermen, ornithologists and nature lovers. Whatever your interest, canals provide something for everyone. Get out there and enjoy!





In Memory of Christopher Etwell (1941–2025)

On Friday 27th June, we gathered to say farewell to a treasured friend, fellow boater, and long-time supporter of CNS — Chris Etwell, who passed away on 6th June after a courageous battle with illness.

Known to all simply as Chris, he was a man of great warmth, quiet wisdom, and unfailing generosity. Whether sharing a laugh with friends, wiring up SPBC clubhouse electrics, bringing a broken clock back to life or working on Savile, Chris left things—and people—better than he found them.

Chris was born on 17th January 1941 and developed an early fascination with how things worked. After studying engineering at Batley Tech and apprenticing at Thornhill Power Station, he joined the Merchant Navy in 1962. There, aboard the SS Canberra, fate intervened—he met Tina while playing cricket on deck, and their love story began. They married a year later and shared a life filled with adventure.

Chris served at sea until 1979, eventually becoming Chief Engineer. When he returned to shore, he worked with the NHS and later rejoined maritime life with Associated British Ports in Hull. But it was in 1981, when he and Tina bought their narrowboat Union Rose, that his passion for inland boating took centre stage. Union Rose was eventually replaced by Swan.

In 1985, Chris and Tina became founding members of South Pennine Boat Club, just as work began at the Battyeford site. Chris played a key role—especially in building and electrical work—and remained a driving force in the club for decades. They also joined the Calder Navigation Society, where Chris became known as the “Senior Skipper,” his skill and helmsman abilities with Savile admired by all. He even crafted the boat’s striking brass and wood steering wheel, a signature piece of his craftsmanship.



Chris never sought the spotlight, but his contributions spoke volumes. He was practical, reliable, and always happy to lend a hand—or share a pint. For many years Chris sat on the CNS committee and made many a contribution to the various discussions. He never missed a Savile drydocking always hands on and ready to give practical advice.

In 2019, Chris was diagnosed with bowel cancer but remained upbeat and determined. He and Tina marked her 80th birthday with a world cruise that took them to Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. When asked his favourite stop, he answered with a smile: “Southampton.”

Chris will be remembered for his sense of humour, his deep love for Tina, and his belief in always doing a “proper job.” His legacy at SPBC and CNS is lasting, and his absence will be felt across the boating community.

Our heartfelt thoughts are with Tina and the family. Thank you, Chris—for the laughter, the leadership, and a life well lived on the water.





2025 – The Savile Programme

2025 is proving to be a relatively easy year for **Savile** as fewer bookings for day trips have been coming in and up to now there have been just four day trips. There are three more confirmed bookings for later in the summer, but if you would like a day out on the water there are still plenty of dates available.



One of the days out was to take a group of staff from the Canal & River Trust to Brighouse as part of their Boating Buddies scheme. The scheme is designed to give members of their staff a chance to gain boating experience on the waterways. As you can see from the photo, Nigel and his friends from the Trust had an enjoyable day out.

In contrast to the day trips, the three days of half hourly trips from Brighouse proved to be very busy indeed with sufficient donations being made to pay for well over half of **Savile**'s annual expenses. Over the course of the three days, 417 people took the half hour trip along Brighouse Cut. The boat can carry just 12 passengers but over the three days we achieved an average of 10.7 passengers per trip. A load factor of 89% - Beat that Ryanair. Special thanks to our shore-based booking department for getting so many keen sailors aboard **Savile**. Thanks Dianne and Richard C.

In comparison with the day trips, the Brighouse trips need far more crew members and without the volunteers we simply could not undertake any of these trips that are such a hit with visitors to Brighouse.

CNS owes a debt of thanks to all who helped crew Savile for these three days.

So, Thank you to…… .Peter, John E, Tony, Daniel, Richard C, Steve, Dianne, John S, Nicki, Richard P, Martyn, Alison, Jerry, Chris and Jim.



Back to the 1940s in Brighouse















I dreamed a dream in time gone by
When hope was high and life worth living……

I must have been watching those Canal & River Trust adverts, as I drifted off to sleep my mind turned to making my life better by water. I began to dream, finding myself aboard my luxurious narrowboat in Sowerby Bridge basin. Boat purchased, licence fees paid and insurance in place, I was heading off to explore the waterways of England. But where was I to go…to Manchester via the Rochdale Canal and then south via the Bridgewater Canal. I knew the Rochdale was closed due to low water, but it would rain soon. But no…the Bridgewater Canal was breached in January's floods so it would be the Macclesfield Canal or the Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal. Even in my dreams I was not up to battling the fierce Mersey tides and surely not but yes it was true, the Macclesfield Canal was closed as well.

It was still a pleasant dream, plenty of options left. I would go east, perhaps to visit Huddersfield or cross the Pennines via the Leeds and Liverpool. But it has not rained and the Huddersfield Broad & Narrow Canals along with the Leeds and Liverpool Canal are all closed due to low water levels. Still not too worried I dreamed on. Eastbound on the Aire & Calder, I could join the Trent at Keadby and head upriver. But what's that? The railway bridge near Keadby is closed to boat traffic. What about Goole and then via the Ouse and Trent Falls? Just like the Mersey, horrendous tides, big ships and impassable for me even in a dream. Just like the waterways, all the options for boating had dried up. I began to ponder of the joys of sailing to Brighouse, Mirfield and Wakefield. But like many a dream it was turning into a nightmare, and as something very heavy came crashing down on my neck, I awoke!

Yes it's true, The Canal & River Trust have closed the guillotine gated lock at Salterhebble for safety work, just to confirm that life by water is only better this year if you do not want to travel anywhere at all.

No wonder the Northern boaters of 2025 look like Les Miserables.



Double Locks – Double the Work

This year's "Brighten Up Your Waterway" challenge looked like it was going to be the biggest so far and so it has proved.

Even driving to the site is a major challenge. Lock Street in Thornhill is a privately owned dirt track amply supplied with potholes, almost as many as the 4000 reported to be in Blackburn, Lancashire. Once you have rocked and rolled down this lane, there is another trapdoor waiting for you. Parking on the road renders you liable to a £100 fine, unless you park in the short section owned by the Canal & River Trust. And yes, you must know where this short section of free parking is as it is not marked in any way at all.



Once you arrive at the Double Locks, Chief CNS Projects Engineer, Peter Davies, insists that we will not just be slapping another coat of paint on top of the fifteen previous coats, this job must be done properly. Preparation is everything…so you labour away with chipping hammers, wire brushes, sandpaper and anything else abrasive that comes to hand until you are down to the bare metal. By the time this part of the task is complete, the only thing abrasive you have left is in the comments directed at our superintendent.



Preparing the gates takes far longer than the subsequent painting process, but even that comes with a sting in the tail. Until you have tried to paint them, you don't realise just how many bollards come with every lock and everyone needs sanding down and painting.



Double Locks - The Results – Before & After















Double Locks – Part 1 Complete



Phew! Now the top lock is complete. Who would have thought it would only take 102.25-man hours work and travel to complete the first lock. Many thanks to Peter and his team of volunteers for such a magnificent piece of work.

Our thanks go to the volunteers – Nigel, Jim, Richard, Tony, Geoff and Peter himself.

We are hoping to start the second lock later this year. Why not lend and hand and join us on site? Peter will be asking for volunteers to help so look out for the email!

Guillotine Lock Crisis



In comparison with the rest of the Northern waterways, the Calder & Hebble has been having a good boating season but this all came to an end on 17th June. On that day, the Canal & River Trust suddenly declared that they had safety concerns about the guillotine locks in West Yorkshire and closed all three with immediate effect. There has been no further explanation of exactly what the problem is. The closures at Slaithwaite and Todmorden will not have any real effect at present as both the Huddersfield Narrow & Rochdale Canals are already closed due to water shortages. On the other hand, the closure of Salterhebble Guillotine Lock had an immediate effect. Shire Cruisers suddenly found themselves with their base on one side of the blockage and the hire boat fleet on the other side. No doubt other boaters also found their summer cruising plans in shreds.





By 20th June, the Canal & River Trust had decided that work needed to be done to ensure that the lock could operate safely. This would take between two and four weeks to complete. A week later they announced that the job was more complicated than they first thought and may well take four weeks. Another week passed by and yes, you guessed it, in the next announcement they expected that the work will take another two to four weeks. And as you can see, repair work was not quite in full swing when this photo was taken on 26th June. The latest update on 17th July is that the new cables have been sorted and work is now expected to take two weeks.

Shire Cruisers are now having to operate their business from Brighouse and all the changeover tasks including cleaning and refuelling the boats are taking place at Brighouse and Elland. Their customers park their cars at Sowerby Bridge and they then must be moved to Brighouse to board their boats. It sounds like a logistical nightmare they could do without.



We can only hope that the works will be completed within the expected fortnight and that the lock will have reopened before you have a chance to read this.



Good News from the Canal & River Trust

Hidden amidst the litany of water shortages, sinkholes and broken paddles that normally fill the Canal & River Trust's Stoppages List are a couple of items of good news.

1) More Big Barges



The first item is a notification of resumed commercial traffic on the Wakefield Branch of the Aire & Calder. The new quarry at Stanley Ferry has started to produce sand and from 14th July, the barge George Dyson is taking cargoes from the quarry to Fleet Lane Wharf on the Aire & Calder Navigation. Sometime ago we reported that planning permission had been granted for the new quarry as long as barges were used to move the sand and gravel and the project has now come to fruition.

George Dyson is one of several barges that have spent the last few years laid up at Goole but at long last work has been found for the 140-ton vessel. She was launched by Harkers at Knottingley in September 1964 and it says much for the quality of their workmanship that she is still capable of going back to work at sixty.



The photos show the loading point at Stanley Ferry and the barge at Fleet Lane.



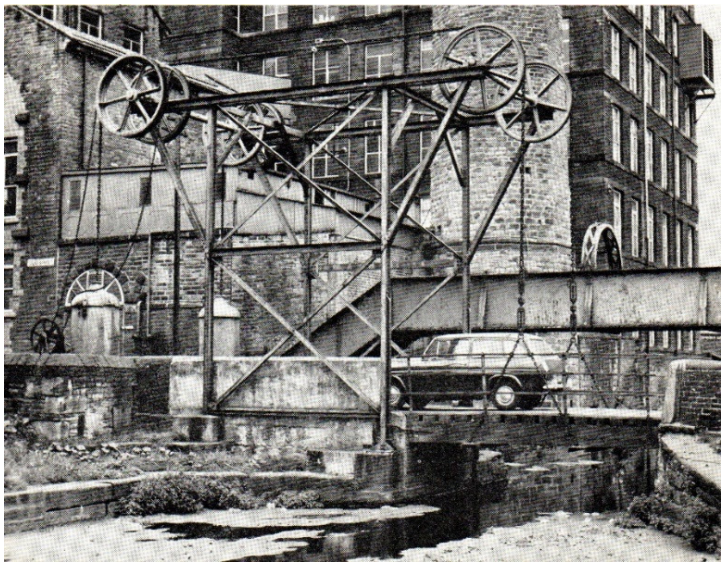
2) Lock Renewals



The second item of good news appears in the Winter Stoppage Programme List. Last year, none of the lock gates on the Calder & Hebble were renewed but this year both Brighouse Bottom Lock and Woodside Mills Lock are going to have their lock gates replaced. The work will take place in early 2026 when the Navigation will be closed for over two months. Brighouse Bottom Lock first appeared on the winter repair list a couple of years ago, but following repairs after a structural failure, it was taken off the list. As you can see from the photos, the Brighouse Lock beams are certainly not in the first flush of youth. One even looks like a dinosaur.







Planning Matters

Huddersfield Broad Canal

Yes, I know you have seen this snap before, but this time it is not the car that's the star, it is the mill behind.

The owners of Turnbridge Mills, shown in the photo, have applied for planning permission to redevelop the site. The changes include the proposed demolition of the Spinning Mill on the site and some new building. The mill itself has recently been given Listed Status and this has complicated the planning process.

Historic England have objected to the proposed changes and they express their concerns as follows:-

"Turnbridge Spinning Mill was built between 1871-73 in a functional style with some Italianate features. It has largely preserved its internal layout which allows us to understand the cast iron, fireproof construction methods and allows an understanding of how the building would have been used for different aspects of the cotton processing, an unusual material milled in this area at this time. It also has a strong group value with the adjacent listed chimney (GII), the listed mill to the south of Quay Street (GII), the scheduled Turn Bridge, as well as several other former industrial buildings which make up a clear group of buildings associated with the cotton processing at the Spinning Mill. Therefore the mill is significant in isolation due to its functional character and appearance, and evidence of a fireproof construction. It also contributes highly to the group value of the surrounding designated and non-designated heritage assets, particularly the chimney, mill south of Quay Street and the scheduled Turn Bridge which create a clear industrial character which is visually dominated by the mass and scale of the two mill buildings."

Unfortunately, by the time you read this, the consultation period for the plans will have ended but if you want to know more about these plans, they can be found at https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/planning-applications/search-for-planning-applications/detail.aspx?id=2025/91122



Colliers Arms Reopened



It is not often today, with many pubs closing, that we can welcome back one of our canal side favourites, the Colliers Arms at Elland.

Flooded on the Boxing Day 2015 and again on the 9th of February 2020 it closed its doors and it seemed like it would be forever. Further problems with the Covid pandemic and the subsidence closing the road from Brighouse to Elland exacerbated the woes of the pub.

So, it was with much surprise recently, as Nicki and I cruised past the Colliers on our Nb Amy, that we saw the lights were lit outside. Could it be…? Yes, it was! It was open and there were people having a drink in the garden. We just had to stop, go in and investigate further, purely in the spirit of journalistic and public interest of course! 😊

The inside had been spruced up and the Colliers had opened on Saturday 31st May under the management of Paul Maycock for Samuel Smith's Old Brewery. His wife Katja said that they had planned a soft opening with no marketing or fanfare but somehow all the locals had found out and knew, so it was "insanely crazy" on the opening day. Testament to the popularity of the pub.

At the time of our visit, it was only open for drinks, but Katja explained that Paul had run restaurants before and it is planned that the kitchen will be re-furbished for the future, although no date can be specified.

Paul, originally from South Yorkshire, has some links to West Yorkshire having served with the Duke of Wellington's Regiment. Katja and he have both worked for a development agency in Afghanistan. They have travelled for several years in many places including Asia and Nicaragua, before coming back to what they truly believe to be "God's own country.".

Both are keen on canal boating and have their own narrowboat "Home from Home" moored alongside the pub. Bought after years of abandonment they stripped it out and renovated it with assistance from a friend. Apparently, this involved pulling it like



horses to Cromwell Bottom where they managed to get the engine working then sailed it to Brighouse then a dry-dock in Shipley. Whilst continuous cruisers they worked on it for 5 months on the renovations and they can be well proud of their efforts.

They have also been known to be out supporting a local group in their efforts to reduce the amounts of Himalayan Balsam in the area, a highly invasive plant posing a threat to canals and riverbanks alike. A subject Katja obviously feels strongly about, maybe she can write about it in a future issue of our newsletters.



"*Home from Home" at home on her home mooring*

With the mooring canal side, Paul and Katja welcome other boaters and say customers can avail themselves of their waterpoint if needed.

We have occasionally in the past taken charters on our trip boat Savile to the Colliers from Brighouse. One of the side rooms there is very interesting with lots of old photos and memorabilia linked to the history of The Calder and Hebble Navigation and it is worthy of a visit sometime.

Maybe we can add the newly re-opened pub to our list of possible destinations, if not with Savile then maybe for a social sometime.

John L Smith



From our Archives - Cruising the Calder on the Princess Mary



Who remembers the Waterbus Service that used to run from Mirfield to Brighouse? I remember a bus stop type sign at Cooper Bridge Flood Lock in my youth but don't remember ever seeing the Waterbus in operation.

A package of information was sent recently to us with photographs and miscellaneous pieces of memorabilia by John Galvin who used to own Mirfield Boat Yard. Included in that were photos of Princess Mary, the boat that was operated by John on the Calder and Hebble Navigation to provide the service.



The Waterbus Service operated on Wednesdays between June and September according to one of the newspaper clips but there are no details of the fares on the route to Brighouse. She is seen here on the Kirklees Cut approaching the M62 Motorway Bridge. Isn't it amazing how the vegetation has changed there over the years?

According to another article from August 1983 in "Metro Topics" (The Journal of the West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive) the PTE and Countryside Commission had launched their Wayfarer Project with several planned Waterbus Services timed to link into local bus and rail services to increase the number of leisure activities by public transport. A route operated by Apollo Canal Cruisers Ltd operated a service 4 times a day on Wednesdays and Sundays with stops along the Leeds Liverpool Canal from Shipley to Bingley. The charges were 30p per fare stage or £2.00 for the full two and a half hour round trip. A "packet "service was also planned for the Calder and Hebble Navigation between Dewsbury and Wakefield, lasting about 3 hours with fares at £2.00 one-way or £4.00 return. It is not clear from the article if it did go ahead but maybe a reader can tell us more?



In a telephone interview with John, who now lives in York, he informed me that the Princess Mary was built in Chester and originally had a TVO engine (as CNS's first boat Doreen had originally too) which was replaced by a Perkins Diesel sometime later. There had been suggestions that she had run trips at Conwy for some time but that has never been confirmed. She did however see service on the Ouse at York before going down to operate on the Thames at Runnymede.



It was from there that John bought the vessel for about £7,000 from French Brothers who had built up a trip boat business with her. He had her transported by road to Mirfield where she made a spectacular entry to the water in April 1984 after which she was in service on the Navigation for around 5 years until 1989 when she was sold.

Regular cruises were operated from the Navigation Inn on Sundays between 2 pm and 4 pm and again at 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm at a fare of "£1.50 for adults and £1.10 for Children and O.A.P.s.", with an on-board bar being available for refreshments.
For those wishing to have a private function, customers could charter the vessel for extended cruises on the Calder with catering available. Prices were £26.00 per hour mornings and afternoons on weekdays and £32.00 per hour for evenings and weekends with a minimum hire of 2 ½ hours. A special rate of £22.00 per hour was





available for Schools and Youth Organisations, with a minimum charge of 2 hours. John's wife Val provided catering with pie and pea suppers, or a choice could be made from a range of set menus with prices starting at £1.50 per head inclusive of tea or coffee. Other more extensive gourmet menus were available with fresh salmon, chicken portions, quiche Lorraine, stuffed eggs and salad, all of which could be finished off with apple pie, fresh hazelnut meringue, fresh cream gateaux or sherry trifle at £2.25 to £5.00 per head depending on the choices.



My how things have changed!

But you can still travel by boat on the Navigation for even less than 1980s prices. A day out on Savile costs just a minimum donation of £80. If you want a great day out by boat, just contact our Savile Co-ordinator at savile@calderns.org.uk



Spot the Waterway – Results



Us Teessiders are always drawn to other places with Transporter Bridges but it is clear from the total lack of response to the Spring Newsletter's "Spot the Waterways" that very few CNS members were born in Middlesbrough.

So where is this waterway? It is in the Basque region of Northern Spain, and just like Middlesbrough, it was once a major steel and shipbuilding town. In both towns, both industries are now a mere shadow of what they once were, but unlike Middlesbrough, the Spanish town is now an upcoming tourist destination based on the impressive Guggenheim Museum. The waterway is the Nervion and the Bizkaia Bridge opened in 1893 links the Bilbao suburbs of Getxo and Portugalete. It is the oldest transporter bridge in the world and is a World Heritage site and well worth a visit.

"Spot the Waterway" is getting just a little jaded, so I think it is time that we featured a new and even more exciting contest. So turn to the next page for our riveting new competition……



The Caption Competition



So how does this work?

All you need to do is to come up with a caption for this photograph.

Mr Google came up with the following caption: -

“Man on boat”

But I am sure that you can do much better than that.

As you will expect, there is no prize, but the winning Caption will feature in the Next Newsletter



Where can I find more CNS news?

This Newsletter is just one of the ways members can keep up with what is happening in the society. If you want to know more, check out our website at:-
https://www.calderns.org.uk/

We are also on Facebook, and our posts can be found by searching for the **Calder Navigation Society.**

Articles & Photos for the Newsletter

Thanks to John Smith and Peter Davies for providing articles for this edition.

Our aim is to publish the newsletter three times a year, in March, July and November. Any articles or photos for the Newsletter should reach me by the first day of the month in which the Newsletter is published. If you would like to write something for the newsletter or have ideas as to what we should be covering, then please get in touch. I can be contacted at:- **editor@calderns.org.uk**

