

Calder Navigation Society
Newsletter March 2026

No Wind in the Willow



Here we are again with another edition of your less than favourite reading matter. We cannot promise the literary skills displayed in The Wind in the Willows but at least the willow knows that spring is here and Mole, Ratty, Toad and Minky are all awakening to enjoy another summer along the cut. It is good to see them all, apart from Minky, we rather wish he would not wake up at all.

This time, apart from all the usual items and more nonsense, we have articles on Missing Links, a Mirfield Anniversary, birds at Cromwell Bottom and the mysterious workings of river level gauges. Thanks to Andy Beck, John Smith and Paul Hesketh for these articles. Maybe you have something you would like to tell us about so now is your chance to put together something for the next edition due out in July.

But first a few words of wisdom from our Chairman…….



A few words from the Chairman – Spring 2026



The days are getting longer now, and signs of spring are appearing, though it does seem to be having to battle against quite cold and stormy weather rather more frequently than we'd perhaps like.

I'm getting enthused about being able to get out and about on our waterways again, both afloat and doing some walking along the towpaths and around the waterside attractions. I can recommend Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve at this time of year with its abundance of birds and wildlife enjoying the better weather. It is featured in an article in this issue with details of how to find it and download guides.



Our plan to trial a weekend of Savile Trips based at The Bridge in Wakefield are now in place for the weekend of June 27th & 28th. We hope to attract members of the public to view the Wakefield Waterfront from the river, leading we hope to a wider membership. The manager of The Bridge expressed great interest when we talked to him and is an enthusiastic "Gongoozeler", even though he didn't realise what it meant at the time of our meeting.

Other Savile bookings are also looking healthy this year so many hands would be welcome to support these events which are an import source of funding for our Society.



A Savile familiarisation day was held on the cut on Saturday 28th March by Richard Potter to build up our skills base for managing the day trips and events. This is to get people familiar with handling the helm but also getting her through locks. It was attended by several members who had expressed a willingness to crew from time to time. If you are interested too, let us know and another day can be arranged.



To further increase our visibility, we intend to produce a new leaflet for the Society which needed updating due to changes at the various establishments that previously supported us with adverts.

We also managed to get a half page advert in the 2026 programme for the Mikron Theatre Group, at no cost to the Society. The Marsden based theatre tours during the summer by canal boat and will be performing at South Pennine Boat Club in the Autumn.



Saturday the 28th March saw Dianne Forster lead a Spring Clean day on Battyeford Cut with members of SPBC and CNS in attendance. We hope to do more along these lines to maintain our local stretch of waterway. Watch out for details and please join in if you can.

So we've a bright start to the year and an action-packed agenda with Brighouse events as usual too. I'm enthused about the year ahead and I hope you are too.

Finally, some sad news. It was with deep regret that our secretary had to inform the Calder Navigation Society membership that Alan Mapplebeck, Trustee, former Chairman and long-time well-respected member of the society passed away early on the morning of 24th March in a residential home on the East Coast, having suffered ill health for some time. He will be sadly missed.

Details of his funeral planned for 2nd April have been circulated to the membership and his friend Tony Foster has kindly offered to express our sympathy and condolences on behalf of CNS.

John L Smith
Chairman



Anthropology Supplement



As anthropologists will tell you, In most societies since the dawn of time, celebrations have been held to mark the passing seasons. And our society is no exception to the rule. It's not quite up there with Up Helly Aa in Shetland or midsummer at Stonehenge, but never mind….

We have no sooner crawled out of bed at the end of our winter hibernation, when the opening event of the year is upon us.

The annual drydock plunge takes place in early February, when contestants wade into the depths to place chocks under **Savile.**

And here is the 2026 event in progress.

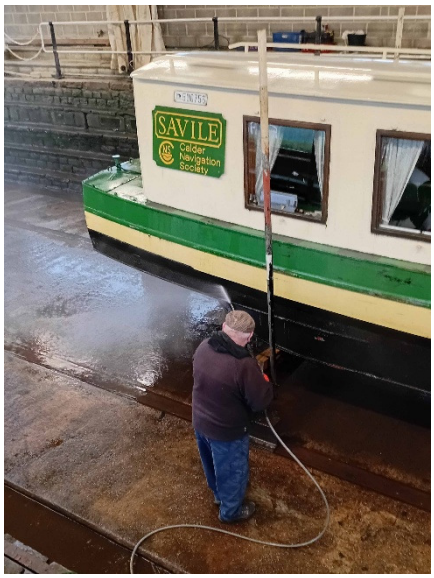


And now you are all awake, it is time to read some slightly more sensible articles……



Watching Paint Dry

The annual dry docking is over and Savile is back at her moorings ready for the new season. Fortunately, this year no major repairs were required and work concentrated on blacking the hull and touching up the topsides of the boat.



Our thanks go to Peter Davies, our Marine Superintendent, and his small team of volunteers for all their efforts. Especial thanks go to Shaun and Ian, two new members whose first practical experience with the society was to pressure hose Savile's hull while standing in 3 inches of water. We can only hope that they come back for more fun and excitement!

After the pressure hose had done its job, it was time to apply the blacking but the weather was so cold and wet that it took two days for the hull to dry. Last year, we painted the blacking on to the hull, this year we applied the treacle that was supposed to be paint. And yes, this took two days to dry. You are getting to see the pattern…so to give all members the chance to see what it was like, just look at each of the photos below for 48 hours, then move on to the next photo……..



Primer



Undercoat



Top Coat

Fortunately, Peter had booked the drydock for a fortnight, so despite all the waiting, the work was completed before we were evicted from the dock.

Many thanks go to Peter, Shaun, Tony, Nigel, John, Ian, Andy and Chris for all their hard work.



2026 – The Savile Programme



Last year was a quieter one for Savile but this year is going to be much busier. We are going to need our volunteer crews on more days and we are actively recruiting crew for the first day trips and the events.

We have three days of trips from Brighouse and two from Wakefield. The Navigation runs from Sowerby Bridge to Wakefield, but in the past, we have tended to concentrate on the section from Dewsbury to Brighouse. Our planned weekend of trips in Wakefield is designed to generate interest in the Navigation from people living at the eastern end of the Navigation and will take place on the last weekend in **June**, **Saturday 27th & Sunday 28th**.

We were worried that the major road works in Brighouse would result in the cancellation of the special events there, but they are going ahead but only on Sundays. The three events are the Spring Market on **Sunday 26th April**, Brighouse Vintage Day on **Sunday 7th June** and the Summer Market on **Sunday 16th August**. The 1940s weekend has been replaced by the Vintage Day this year as there will be insufficient space left in the town centre for all the 1940s displays.

On these event days, Savile will operate trips every half hour from 1000 until 1600 and more than 130 people will have a chance to sail on their local waterway on each day. Most of our annual donations come from these short boat rides and it is essential that we do them to increase local awareness of the waterways and to bring in enough money to cover Savile's annual expenses.

The only downside to these events is that we need 8 volunteers to crew the boat and man the shore station. I have already contacted our members who have said they would like to crew Savile this year, but there is always room for more. If you would like to crew Savile but are not on our list, please get in touch with me at Savile@calderns.co.uk



The Winter Stoppages

Last year there were no lock gate replacement works on the Calder & Hebble, but this year two locks have had their gates replaced at a cost of over £300,000 for the pair. Brighouse Bottom Lock and Woodside Mills Lock at Elland were closed from early January for the work to take place and they have now reopened with the new gates in place.

Brighouse Bottom Lock has been on the list for several years now, but following temporary repairs some time ago, priority was given to other projects. Now at last the work has been done and the Volunteer Lock Keepers at Brighouse just cannot wait for a chance to try them out. The photos below give an idea of the work involved.



Setting up on 15th January – pumps, fences, stop planks and the rest….



On 20th January the stop planks are being fitted to allow the old gates to be removed.



Some idea of all the safety and security equipment that is needed can be seen in this photo – security perimeter fences, safety railings made from scaffolding poles round the lock etc.





When it is freed from the lock gate, the paddle gear looks like a steam punk horse sculpture.



The old bottom gate, a twenty-year firewood supply for a boater.



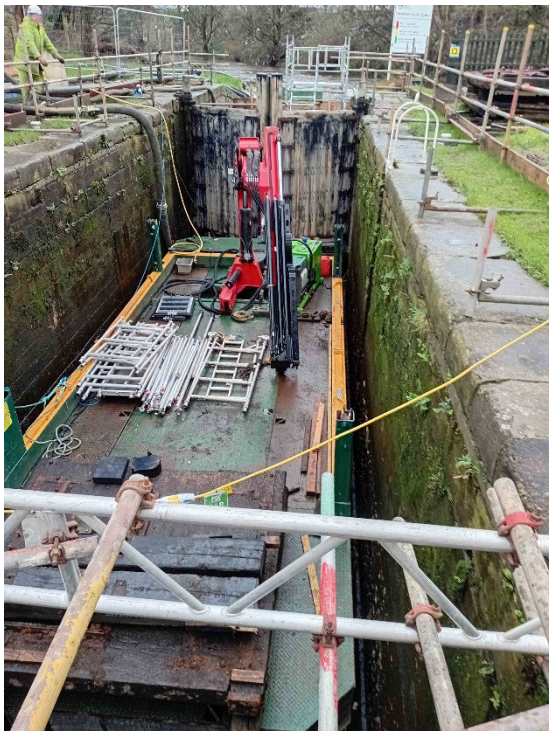


And here are two photos showing the parts that we never normally see…

Protected by the stop planks, at the head of the lock, the new wooden cill is in position, ready to spend the next 25 years under water.



And at the lock tail the lock bottom is mainly floored by wood with some stone used as well.



The crane barge was an essential tool and remained in the lock for almost all the work.

By early March all the work was completed at Brighouse and the lock is ready for the upcoming boating season.



Woodside Mills Gate Replacement



At the Woodside Mills Lock at Elland, the work was completed a few days earlier and when this photo was taken on the 3rd March just a small amount of paving work remained to be done.



The second photo shows the access road and the amount of land that is needed for all the equipment and replacement parts.



250th Anniversary of the Mirfield Cut

By John Smith



The Calder and Hebble Navigation is rather resilient being a combination of River and Canal and so we were able to make the best of what cruising was available and Savile had a decent year for trips and events. Much of the resilience of the Calder and Hebble is due to the engineering of our predecessors building the canals, who cut the sections to bypass the shoaly parts of river and added boards to the weirs to increase the navigability of the waterway. The engineer (featured here) was William Jessop.

December 7th last year was the 250th Anniversary of the decision by the canal company taken in 1775 to construct the Mirfield Section of Canal "*to get rid of the great inconveniences complained about on the river between Shepley Bridge and Mirfield*". Jessop was engaged to build the cut and John Pinkerton to cut it. This



proceeded at a great pace by all accounts. Jessop himself was in business on the navigation too and he along with Pinkerton ran a dry dock at Mirfield made out of the old cut they had replaced in 1776. This dry dock is still there today by the flood lock at Legard Bridge. In 1786, according to Charles Hadfield in his book "The Canals of Yorkshire and the North East" they also started sending coal down the navigation from a colliery they owned near Whitley Wood for lime-burning. Their connections with the canal company meant that they enjoyed a special toll for this enterprise.





The route of the old cut too is still visible today, particularly at this time of year before the trees come into leaf. If you go on Calder Road to the junction with Chapel Court and look across the river towards Legard Mill the entry to the old cut is clearly visible as it leaves the River Calder.

Further evidence of it can be seen from the car park at Legard Mill as it comes up behind the relatively new houses on South Brook Gardens and then passes behind the low red brick building close to the entrance to the car park.





Little evidence of it is visible on Back Station Road because the railway has been built over it, but if you go a short way down the foot path off Newgate that heads toward the Navigation Pub you can see the other end of the drydock. The stonework of the railway is kinked at this point presumably to accommodate the old cut in the early days of the railway.





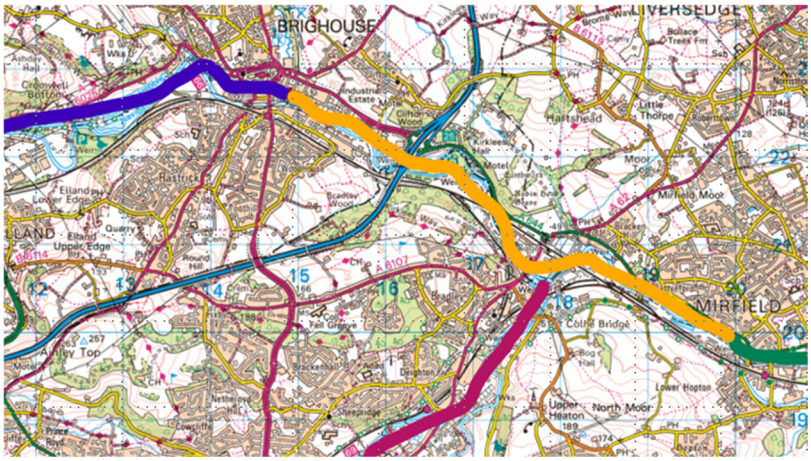
The Calder Towpath – *between Brighouse and Mirfield*

By Andy Beck

I do a little work on rights of way advisory groups. In one of these I found the Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust (WWCT - formerly Sustrans) spending grant money on towpaths on the Leeds & Liverpool Canal. Thinking about the state of the towpaths on OUR waterway, it occurred to me that much better uses of public money could be found along the Calder.
I don't like to moan, so instead I put together a little PowerPoint to explain what I think can be done. I've sent this to everyone I can think of including CRT (Sean McGinley wishes me success), WWCT and both Calderdale and Kirklees councils and the new west Yorkshire Combined Authority (Tracey Brabin's organisation).

I was wondering what to do next when Richard asked if I could write this for the CNS newsletter. What a good idea!
My argument is that there are several important "green" routes suitable for, well, Walking, Wheeling and Cycling, through the Calder & the Colne valleys – but there's a missing link in that you can't easily get from Brighouse Basin to Ledgerd Bridge in Mirfield. This route also passes the end of the Ramsden Canal so joins up all three. Of course, we all know there are serious obstacles – missing bridges, paths obliterated by development etc.

But there's a lot that COULD be done. Sections that are passable could be upgraded for a start. Bypass routes for the blockages could be signposted. And we can always look to plugging the gaps in the future.



Blue's the C&H towpath West of Brighouse (walkable to Sowerby Bridge and indeed via the Rochdale canal to Manchester) Red's the Ramsden canal (walkable to Huddersfield) and Green is the Calder down to Mirfield and beyond. My proposal is to link these great routes by restoring the yellow bit.



Meanwhile here are a few pictures to whet your appetite:
Things we have lost:



The bridge at Brighouse

And at Mirfield





But at Battyeford this bridge Survives.



If you think restoring this route is a great idea and you are a Kirklees or Calderdale resident, you can help raise awareness by writing positively about it to your councillor (if you don't know just use https://www.gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors to find out – it's that easy! Oh and the regional Mayor Tracey Brabin's office too - they say they are actively looking for off-tarmac through routes in West Yorkshire. https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/contact-us/ .
Be sure to let them know who you are, where you live and how restoring this path would enhance your life.

Andy has put the whole thing online – and if you would like to download a PDF copy of the whole slide pack, please email me at **editor@calderns.org.uk** and I will arrange for Andy to send you the web address.

The mystery of Water Levels

By Paul Hesketh

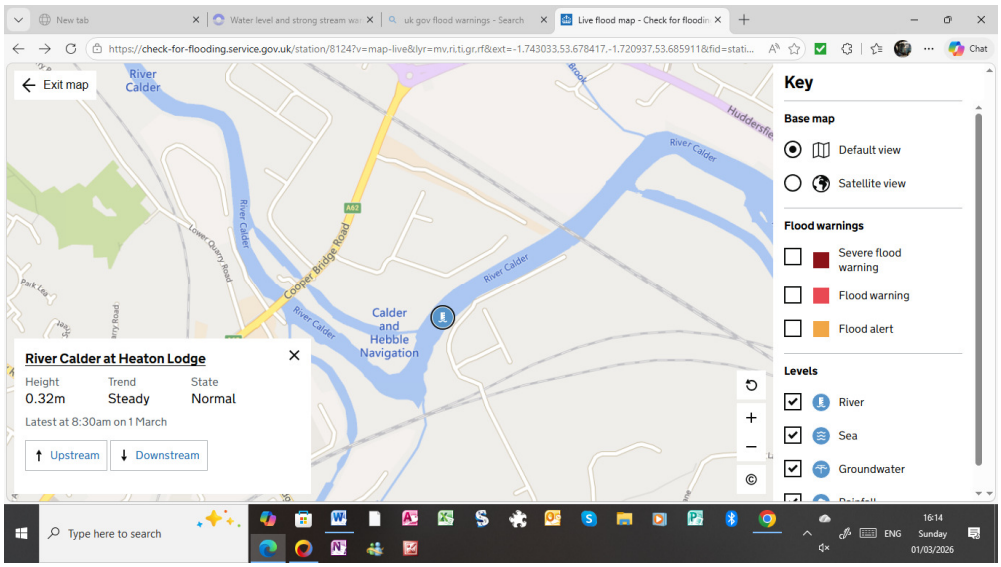
Rivers Calder and Aire RAG Heights.

Whilst travelling on the Yorkshire Navigations we are always concerned about the river levels. The latest CRT notices are much easier to read regarding the flood lock / gate status, however for example, when it states Anchor Pit is closed, when is it likely to be reopened? On the Aire and Calder, when the flood locks are closed, you want to know if the rivers are in the Red, or not and if the flood locks are safe to use. Checking the river level RAG (Red Amber Green) indicators isn't normally convenient; as it may mean moving your boat from a good mooring down to a flood lock or gate, just to check if it is safe to continue.

The most accurate river level information is on the GOV UK website showing the river levels and warnings over the last 5 days. I find it useful to know that the Lemonroyd Lock is on Red / Amber when the Overton Lemonroyd gauge is at 0.67m. The locks flashing red traffic light comes on slightly higher into the red. Whilst we are happy to travel on Amber, with due care, some boaters prefer to travel only in the Green. I've contacted the GOV UK website to see if additional reference RAG data can be added for boaters. I've also contacted the CRT, but they don't have a list. Knowing the RAG heights at say Greenwood, Castleford and Lemonroyd, boaters should be able to check the river levels remotely, the more locations the better.



GOV.UK River Calder level at Heaton Lodge



River Level Indicator



The Calder is monitored at Heaton Lodge just below Greenwood Lock; knowing what the height is when the river is at Red / Amber would help understand the navigation.

Last year we stayed a bit longer in Goole until the Aire at Castleford started to fall, another time in Selby we came back quickly because it was raining and the rivers were on the rise.

If you know the heights at different locations and are happy to share them we can compile a useful list for all boaters?



Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve

By John Smith

A hidden gem along our navigation is the Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve. In addition to the flooded lagoon and reedbed area sporting different water birds such as Coots and Moorhens, there is a bird feeding area and a disused part of the canal called Tag Cut that was bypassed when the section of Brookfoot to Salterhebble was built. The remains of the locks are visible at both ends but the Elland end is most accessible and there are remains of sections of the waterway visible between them. As the trees come into leaf and spring flowers come into bloom it is the right time to go enjoy Cromwell Bottom Nature Reserve. This haven of wildlife is easily accessible from either Brighouse or Elland by a gentle walk of just over a mile along the towpath of the Calder and Hebble Navigation. For the less able it can also be accessed from Brookfoot Lock or the car park accessed off the A6025 Brighouse to Elland Road by following the brown sign down Cromwell Drive.



It should be a hive of activity now with plenty of variety of birds visiting the feeding area and hide which is a short walk off the towpath. Typical species seen there are Blue Tit, Bullfinch, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Robin and Wagtail. (The birds on the photos on this page do not have a strange infection of their feet but have been enjoying the fat balls too much.)









If you are lucky you may see one of our most common birds in the UK, the Wren. This is however seldom seen because of its size, and tendency to stay well concealed in shrubbery. And if you are really lucky you may see a more rarely seen species such as the Nuthatch. (Right-hand picture below.)
The pictures shown here were taken with my relatively simple (by today's standards) digital camera with a 300mm telephoto lens. You can see other splendid examples of a wide variety of species taken by much more professional photographers than me,





with great close-up shots and detail. Go on, see if you get enthused about ornithology, but be careful. If you get the bug you may find yourself investing in some serious piece of kit!
Get further details and downloadable guides from the website.
https://cromwellbottomlnr.co.uk/



The Saga Ends

Since I started writing for CNS, one subject has been guaranteed to take up more column inches than anything else. Yes, you guessed it…it is the story of the Salterhebble Lock Cottage.

We have recorded plans to restore it as a community hub, concerns about a possible bat roost, consternation about vandalism and then the provision of a new roof. All this was followed by an auction that proved far more successful for the Canal & River Trust than we ever thought possible and now the new owners have carried out a major refurbishment.

And after all that the outside looks just the same as it did when the lock keeper lived there twenty years ago.



So here it is, all ready for you to book your dream holiday, complete with hot tub. Forget that week in Dubai, try this instead.

The cottage can be booked through

Booking.com and Airbnb.

And here it is in 2007 when the resident lockkeeper was in residence. Can you spot the difference?



So far, I have noticed the removal of the waterway lifebelt and signage as well as the replacement of windows with a more traditional style. Can you see anything else?



Just Passing Through



Last year, one of the leading narrow boating You Tubers spent a few weeks in Brighouse Basin waiting for the river to fall. The Mindful Narrowboater moved on and she is now heading west on the Leeds & Liverpool.

In mid-March this year, leading You Tuber and star of TV's Canal Boat Diaries, Robbie Cumming was in town for a couple of nights and his boat Naughty Lass was berthed in the lower basin.

We did not see the man himself, rumour has it that he was in Wetherspoons.

The Caption Competition – Results

And the winner is Steve Moss who came up with "I think we need a bigger bilge pump". And as the only one to come up with a caption – Congratulations Steve!!





The Caption Competition - An apology

Following publication of the last Newsletter, concerns were expressed that our photo had been copied from the advertising campaigns of other organisations. It was alleged that the Canal & River Trust were going to use it as part of their latest recruitment campaign entitled: -

"Join the Canal & River Trust and play pontoon all day!".

This must be fake news as the Canal & River Trust always play their cards right and would never come up with a slogan like that.

A usually unreliable source also suggested that the photo was due to be used in a forthcoming press release from the local Transport Authority. It was suggested that it would be used to illustrate the press release

"Mayor announces waterbreaking new mass transit system for West Yorkshire. She said that we have tried trolleybuses and trams without success but this one will be a winner. Building work is expected to be finished by 1776."

Your editor sincerely apologises for any distress and inconvenience caused by our use of this photo. And for issuing this newsletter on the 1st of the month.



Spot the Waterway

As we have not got any photos suitable for a Caption Competition, here we are back to our old standby.

Do you know where this is?

There are no prizes, but if you get it right…..

You get to feel a little superior to all the rest of us!



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, X (Twitter) and Instagram. Our posts can be found by searching for the **Calder Navigation Society.**

Articles & Photos for the Newsletter

Thanks to John Smith, Andy Beck and Paul Hesketh for providing articles.

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**

For anything to do with Savile trips, crewing or drydocking, I can be contacted at:- savile@calderns.org.uk

