

STAFFORD RIVERWAY LINK

(A Community Interest Company)

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Patron:- The Lord Stafford, DL, FRAGS

Objective: To promote the restoration of the historic river and canal waterway linking the county town of Stafford to the national waterways network for the benefit of the community and all interested groups.

Website: www.stafford-riverway-link.co.uk

Newsletter No 35

January 2022

Hello to All our Members!

As we are still in January, I can probably still wish you all a 'Happy New Year' and here's hoping it is an improvement on the last two. We hope for good health, a return to normal activities, increased fund-raising opportunities and a visual impact regarding 'PROGRESS'. Where we have been able to, members and friends have kept things moving and there have been work parties and social events albeit in moderation. Contact with like-minded folk, good conversation and some activity has been a boost to everyone's well-being and a big 'thank you' to people who have attended events.

We have one major change to our personnel since the last newsletter. We have a new chairman. First, though, thanks to Mike Price who held the team together for a few months but had always said his offer to 'Chair' was temporary. Now we welcome Paul Bryan as chairman and it wasn't long before I was badgering him for a few words to include in this! So what follows is

.... **FROM THE CHAIRMAN** : I have been a member of the committee of SRL since March 2009, and I was elected as chair in December 2021.

My interest in boating dates back to the 1970s when I was involved with the Truman Trust, taking parties of school children on residential trips on the "Usk" and the "AJ Felgate".

On taking early retirement from teaching, I worked for several years for a national charity engaged in promoting community boating.

We bought our boat in 2002 and have travelled over most of the canal system. The boat is moored at the bottom of our garden in Rugeley.

My skill-set does not extend to civil engineering, but I have built and maintained the website, produced the latest leaflet, and moved bricks barrow-load by barrow-load!

Much has been accomplished over the twelve years since I joined SRL, and with the team and partnerships now in place the future looks very bright.

Paul Bryan.

Paul has made his presence felt in several ways since taking on this role. He has been to work parties and at the January social evening, along with his wife, joined fellow committee member, Geoff, in providing the evening's entertainment. We had some excellent guitar playing to accompany some great singing. For those of you yet to attend any of the social nights, do come along. There is usually 'something to entertain you', a raffle, updates on recent happenings not to mention good conversation and a bar! We meet on the 2nd Wednesday of the month at Stafford Boat Club, from 7.30 p.m. The boat club offers us the venue free as they are big SRL supporters, but they hope we will support the bar, which boosts their income. These meetings tend to run from October to March – the less busy 'boating season' for many members. As such, we anticipate the last meeting of this season will be March. Money raised from the raffles tend to keep the small purchases ticking over – refreshments for the workers, occasional bags of cement, an urgent need for a screw, a bit of timber etc. Your support here is as valued as the support for bigger needs – a zillion bricks, the cost of surveys, reports, hiring machinery etc.

For those who don't know about the Stafford Boat Club, every year they raise money for the chosen charity, which changes each January. The Riverway Link has benefited 3 times over the years they have fund-raised and it was good that we were the latest group to benefit. Because of the curtailed efforts due to Covid, they kept us as their charity for a second year, with no change-over in 2021, but last week, at the 2022 change-over evening the Boat Club presented Yvonne, treasurer of The Riverway Link, with news that over £2400 would be transferred to our account – seems cheques are a thing of the past. Not quite the same visual impact as those great big cheques being handed over, but our gratitude is there in abundance!

It seems appropriate here to wish a very speedy recovery to John M., vice chair of SRL and Commodore of the Boat Club. John has recently had a major operation and is much missed by both groups that he supports in so many ways. May we soon see him about again but I know many people will be thinking of him, wishing him well and also his wife, Chris. I would say, 'look after yourselves' but really we hope that people are looking after you both.

Site progress

Since the last newsletter substantial progress has been made at the Baswich site on landscaping and planting. Over 150 trees and hedging plants have been planted together with several areas of wildflowers and native bulbs. We thank the Soroptimist International, Stafford division, for their help in the tree planting.

In September the Russell Newbery Register held their Autumn gathering at Stafford Boat Club and visited the site. Some of their members returned in the afternoon and laid the towpath up to and round the lock approach area. The register also raised over £200 for us via Stafford Boat Club.

Our first donated seat is now in position by the future lock entrance.

Our team of builders have now almost completed the basin walls with just a few metres to take the walls up to the bridge entrance. The bridge construction, (which we were hoping to begin this Spring), has had to be delayed for several reasons. We need to complete some paperwork and design details to get final approval from CRT before beginning construction. More funds also need to be raised as the bridge and associated bits will cost us many thousands of pounds.

The builders will, for the coming season, concentrate on the basin floor lining. It has been decided to use concrete for this, laid in large 'slabs' with a waterproof seal between. This method of construction has been used on other projects and will allow for any ground movement in the future without risk of the cement cracking.

We are also in the process of teaming up with the Stafford College construction department. This will mean that the college students will be training on the site and that SRL will be able to have access to their machinery and plant. This move will be of great benefit to both parties and will also mean that SRL 'ticks another couple of boxes' as we are a community group and therefore need to involve the local community in the project.

Our regular work parties have now started up again, with the first one being Saturday 5th Feb but after that we are aiming to hold them the 2nd weekend of each month, starting on Saturday, March 12th. All will be on the Saturdays, some on the Sundays as well depending on the work and weather. Watch the site notice board, Facebook page and the SRL website for details and updates.

We need to continue to push on with this project and to this affect we need your help. Please join us at the work parties and / or at other events to give a hand if you can.

Many thanks to all who have helped in any way over these last couple of, very difficult, years and we hope to see you all again soon.

John

John Potter (Site coordinator)

In the summer of last year the Link benefited from a donation from Adrian Wedgwood who has contributed the following article to this newsletter.

My Support for the Stafford Riverway Link - Adrian Wedgwood

With Maz, my wife, and our two sons we lived alongside the Staffs & Worcs canal at Meadow Ridge, Stafford, for many years whilst I was responsible for trade technical services at Bass M&B in Birmingham & then as Area Director for the brewery's tenanted pubs in Staffordshire. The Sun Inn in Stafford now owned, along with The Bod at Weeping Cross, by Titanic Brewery in Burslem (whose owners once ran the Scout Outdoor store in Mill Street), was my favourite.

Work then took us to Bradford on Avon on the Kennet & Avon Canal & then back to Staffordshire & Barton under Needwood close to the Trent & Mersey Canal.

My family's name is inextricably linked with our canal system.

Josiah Wedgwood, 18th Century entrepreneur, member of the Royal Society, slavery abolitionist, Lunar Society visionary and world-famous potter from Burslem then Etruria & later Barlaston was the principal promoter of the Trent & Mersey Canal & funded the Act of Parliament granted on the same day as that for the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal. He was also grandfather to Charles Darwin. In present day terms Wedgwood's revolutionary vision must rank with the subsequent development of the railways, our motorway network & the Channel Tunnel!

Keen to get his products to wider markets at home & abroad Wedgwood was, in 1766, the first treasurer of the Trent & Mersey Canal and later funded the Caldon Canal to provide raw materials to his works. Opening the new canal to the Mersey & Humber ports helped not only Wedgwood but the brewers of Burton whose ales became favourites of Russia's Catherine the Great in exchange for which high grade Memel oak was imported for coopering casks.

Canals are in my blood. Since my early retirement we've 'boated' most of the connected system, including to London, throughout the Midlands, the Leeds & Liverpool, Bridgewater, Shropshire Union, Trent & Mersey, Ashby, Grand Union, Macclesfield, Huddersfield Narrow, Rochdale, Lee, Gloucester & Sharpness, Fosdyke, Droitwich, Langollen & 'Monty' plus the Avon & tidal Thames & Trent.

Sadly, my wife's severe Stroke and my advancing years have restricted our boating and this year's two weeks on the Caldon Canal was our 'swansong' cruise.

Recently, when throwing a party to celebrate my milestone birthday, I invited our 80 guests to donate funds to the IWA in lieu of gifts so canal restoration projects in Staffordshire could be supported. That appeal has so far generated £700 (including Gift Aid recovery).

Knowing the area well, being impressed with the progress made and the prospect of seeing the new basin in water during my lifetime I have given the proceeds to the Stafford Riverway Link. A restoration project certain to achieve its objectives. My aim is that this and use of my family name will encourage others to support this visionary project.



Pictures show Adrian presenting a cheque to 'SRL' and Adrian with his wife, Maz. Note the Wedgwood building in the background. Thank you, again, for this generous gesture.

We finish this newsletter with a couple of recent pictures of the site. Looking forward to seeing some of you at the work parties or social events as 2022 moves on.

Best wishes from us all, Vee



The local Soroptomist group.



Russell Newbery Register members laying towpath.



Aerial view of site



The lock entrance.



Corporate member

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