

# **The Ditchcrawler**

## **Autumn 2023**



**THE NCCC IS EIGHTY YEARS OLD !**

**(See NCCC 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary souvenir)**



## Chairmans Letter

Dear Members,

This quarter saw the Clubs 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on Saturday the 9<sup>th</sup> September followed by a club BBQ on the Sunday 10<sup>th</sup>. Prior to this we had a slight incident where the second bogy on the slipway system became derailed and we had to get a crane in to lift it back onto the rails. No damage was done except to the club bank balance and its all sorted now and running as normal so no need to worry.

The planning as you can expect for the 80<sup>th</sup> was done over a number of weeks with things changing on a regular basis, but in the end, it was sorted and amazingly went according to plan. The only change was because of the hot day the bar opened earlier (thank goodness).

The day started off with the Chairman/Commodore and other helpers meeting and greeting the VIP's and invited guests and members on the gate from 12.30 pm and directing them to their various parking places and meeting places.

The members gathered outside to unveil the plaque which is inset into the stone block under the flagpole which was inscribed by Ian Spooner. As the longest serving member I asked Chris Potter to say a few words about his time in the club and relay a few of his memories.

The VIP's and dignitaries at the same time had gathered upstairs for the unveiling and dedication of the railway line to Willie Walker who before his sad and untimely demise had spent a great deal of time and effort researching the past usage of the club arm as a coal station for transporting coal into the Manchester area. The railway track was unearthed during recent dredging in the arm and cleaned up and painted by Willie and is now mounted over the large radiator on the right of the fire escape with the casement being crafted by Dave Hood and Mike Robison. From here the VIP's and invited guests made their way down the fire escape and round to the 'Mary Sunley' taking a few minutes on route to view the old mine shaft which is on the right of the arm on your way out and will in time be made a feature. Once aboard they went on a cruise down the canal with members regaling them with memories past and present and the clubs' aspirations and visions for its future.

The members meanwhile made their way up the front staircase and into the room to view the railway track and to await the afternoon teas being supplied by 'Cinnamon Bear'.

The VIP's etc returned to the club room for 3.00 to partake in the cream teas with the members and to the accompaniment of the 'Union Chapel Jazz Band'.

The band had a break after their first stretch of 45-minutes wherein the club treasurer Ruth Smith donated a cheque of £100 from the NCCC to the charity boat 'Mary Sunley'.

Following this Stoke Boat Club which our club have a close relationship with presented the NCCC with an inscribed plaque celebrating our 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (this will take pride of place on the wall above the railway line) together with a cash donation. I then on behalf of the club raised a toast to the NCCC and its future. The band then recommenced their accompaniment for the final 45-minutes finishing at 4.15pm.

The band finished their entertainment and departed soon after, a few attendees stayed for a while. Some including myself stayed quite late for a quiet drink after a hectic day.

Everyone who came said they had had a really good day and thought the food and especially the band were exceptional. The feedback has been absolutely excellent.

It goes without saying that an event like this needs a lot of help from the members who put a lot of time and effort into making it an outstanding success as well as the outside agencies. It helped that the weather was absolutely fabulous. A big thank you to you all as well as the patrons who turned up on the day.

The Sunday BBQ was well attended and as usual we provided for the vegetarians among us. The large Gazebo had been left up from the day before so there was somewhere for people to shelter should it rain, but in the event, we were blessed with sunshine like the day before. Somebody must have been smiling on us? The BBQ started at 12.30pm on what we all refer to as Willie's lawn and nearly everyone had arrived by 1.00pm.

This year we were trialling a new BBQ set that had been donated to the club by Mike & Val Hodgkinson and was run on gas which they also provided instead of the usual charcoal.

Because of illness the usual expert grill masters (now don't laugh) were not available so we had to make do with some substitutes in the form of Jim Ling and Bill Wilkinson who in the event did an admiral job and didn't burn a thing (I think they had done it before). Having said that Jim had assembled the BBQ gave it a good scrubbing and tried it out the day before, but didn't cook anything on it so Sunday was literally a baptism of fire.

Once everybody had stoked up on beef burgers and sausages and consumed their own drinks, they slowly began to pick up their chairs (leaving the clubs chairs thankfully) and drift home. This left only the cooks and the clearer and cleaner uppers at about 3.30pm.

Thanks must go to the stand in cooks, the cleaners the clearers and washing uppers. Too many to mention by name. Great Job.

**John Fenton**

**Chairman**

### **Commodores Letter**

Dear Members,

As this will probably be the last 'Ditchcrawler before Christmas I would like to remind you that the lists have now gone up in the club room for the following events: -

Laying Up Supper	Saturday 26 <sup>th</sup> October
Christmas Party	Saturday 9 <sup>th</sup> December
Brass Band Concert	Sunday 17 <sup>th</sup> December <b><i>please note this is a Sunday</i></b>

Members wishing to come to these events unless you put your name up in the club room, please get in contact either myself or Pam Russell.

Notes to remember: - If you put or ask for your name to be appended to a list and you have to cancel for any reason, please give adequate notice as if its too close to the time you will have been catered for and consequently have to pay.

Also, Pam Russell is running the Brass band concert this year not Brian Bowker so please get in touch with her or me to book tickets.

I'm not sure yet whether we will have a New Year Party as usually there is not enough response. I will get the postmistress to send out a questionnaire as to what people think.

After the AGM I will put out a 'Commodores Programme' which hopefully we might be able to follow assuming C&RT don't decide to close the locks.

If anybody has any requests of places to go or try to go, please get in touch and let me know. Bear in mind that those of us with fibreglass boats will not be allowed through the Standedge tunnel. I hope to see as many of you as possible soon, especially at the club DO's any questions please get in touch.

Thanks

John Fenton Commodore,

(Contact numbers Pam 07806267012 John 07985596637)

## Membership Services Director's Report

We are very pleased to welcome the following new members to the NCCC:

### New Members

Martin Duffy  
John Nelson  
Heather Rowley (Associate member)  
Martin Truman

### Boat name

n/b Ventnor  
cruiser Gretel  
  
n/b Taniwha

### Newish Members

Silvia Bentley-Jordan  
Terence Bentley-Jordan  
Sharon Champion  
Paul Dixon  
Gareth Jones  
Peter Levene  
Luke Sinclair  
Nicholas Jackson

cruiser The Eagle  
cruiser The Eagle  
Penny Peace  
Excalibur  
n/b Andante  
cruiser The Eagle  
n/b Firbob  
n/b Meandering on

## Canal Stalwart and Local Historian takes his last Journey 'Afloat'



William Walker, a long serving and devoted, retired employee of British Waterways (now Canal & River Trust) will be given a most fitting send off when he made his last waterborne journey aboard the Phoenix narrowboat on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2023. Departing from Whaley Bridge at 10am, William's coffin was transported on a last trip afloat, in traditional style, to Bugsworth Basin, one of his favourite places on the Peak Forest Canal where he was foreman for many years. The boat will be captained by William's good friend Ian Braine. This Canal Basin, the head of navigation of the canal, was the largest and busiest inland port on Britain's narrow canal system and the only one to survive intact. William was fascinated by its complete restoration with an abundance of wildlife, true escapism and tranquillity.

William resided at Wharf Cottage in High Lane for over 40 years and was a highly valued member of the adjacent North Cheshire Cruising Club, where he would regularly be seen presenting local history talks, quizzes and film nights. He had recently been made a director and was looking after the archives as well as a special event to commemorate the club's 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, which will still be going ahead as a tribute to William in September.

An extremely passionate local historian, William cared so much about educating people of all ages, about lost crafts and traditions and the important history and heritage of canals, mills and working life during and after the war. Friends from William's extremely diverse life were represented as passengers on board the Phoenix together with his close family. A long-serving member of Stockport Harriers, William successfully completed several London marathons and other significant runs in Europe, including Austria, Germany and the Netherlands and he was a pioneer in raising funding for a professional track at Woodbank Park in Stockport. One key thread ran throughout the entire life of William's adventures – to always be learning, sharing knowledge, giving people reasons to smile and living life to its full. He was certainly the sunshine in everyone's life and he has left behind an amazing and rich legacy of memories to be cherished by many future generations.

### **The Life of William**

William Henry Walker was born in Edgeley neighbourhood in 1939 and grew up with his three sisters and one brother and derived an early passion for motor vehicles which later inspired him to undertake a 7- year apprenticeship. He became a fully officiated rally driver and a specialised mechanic in performance racing cars.

In his thirties, William engaged in a new hobby that often found him knee deep in mud and debris and up against much political opposition when he joined ASHTAC and was involved in restoring the Ashton Canal. This experience inspired a complete career change and William was delighted when he was offered a job with British Waterways in 1979. The new role was William's absolute niche in life and he became a greatly admired "Friend to the waterways" where he excelled in "Making a difference" which he described as his "Raison d'être" in life. When he officially retired from his last role as Project Officer in 2004, William could not resist but to return to a part-time job as License and Moorings Officer, where once again his delightful smile and chivalrous, influential manner ensured that lots of boaters' unpaid fees soon got paid.

### **A True Waterways Stalwart with a Unique Persona**

Stuart Mills, Canal & River Trust chief investment officer, said: "I have very fond memories of working with Bill in his role as a trades union representative and of his deep passion for the waterways. I know that he has been a dedicated waterways supporter for over 40 years and his commitment has been remarkable.

"His passion for local history and the canal network has meant that he has served tirelessly as a volunteer, both before and after his retirement, including managing the heritage boat Ibex and later being involved with the Saturn Project.

"In 2000, I can recall that William successfully put the canal network in the spotlight when he delivered barrels of Royal Ale, "mashed" in person by Queen Elizabeth II, from Bass Brewery in Burton-upon-Trent to Camden Wharf aboard our heritage boat. "I personally greeted the small volunteer crew upon arrival of the boat at Camden and, destined for delivery to Buckingham Palace, the barrels were transferred to the Royal Family horse and dray. It took three weeks to complete the journey from Burton-upon-Trent and William volunteered for this opportunity in his own time.

“William could often be seen in a traditional boatman’s costume, making a lasting impact with the younger generation, and keeping historic boating traditions alive. He will be greatly missed.”



### **The Funeral**

Following William’s “Last Journey Afloat”, a historic tradition, the funeral procession departed from Wharf Cottage at 1pm for a service in Rowan Chapel at Stockport Crematorium at 1:45pm.

Friends and family are warmly invited for refreshments and reminiscences afterwards at High Lane Conservative Club from 2:30pm.

Jeremy Unsworth’s Funeral Directors, New Mills are taking care of funeral arrangements and have organised previous bespoke funerals for canal enthusiasts who want to follow the boating traditions as their last wishes.

**The Phoenix.** The Phoenix started her life as a live aboard narrowboat. In the mid 2000’s, most unfortunately, she was vandalised and set on fire. The subsequent sinking would have meant the end for most boats, but not for Phoenix. The previous owners re-floated the vessel, repaired the damage and undertook modifications to turn her into a day hire boat. Phoenix didn’t exactly rise from the ashes; she rose from the mud.

Ian Gilman the owner of Phoenix is proud to be enabling the family and friends to take William on his “Last Journey Afloat”

## **Our Trip to Whiteley Green - NB Royal Oscar Heth and Nige**

For any of our new members who have not yet been to Whiteley Green, then we would recommend you go.

Whiteley Green is a private mooring that belongs to NCCC for our members to use. It is just before Bridge 19 on the Macclesfield Canal. Very tranquil and relaxing.

Whilst at the club on the Friday night (June 17), we were trying to decide should we go out tomorrow or do a bit more maintenance on NB Royal Oscar. Well Saturday arrived, up early, Nigel made tea and toast at 6.30am, we got our stuff together to take with us, and decided to do an early start to Whiteley Green. We left the marina about 8.30ish and got up to Whiteley Green just after 10.30am. On route passing two of our members on their return journey back to North Cheshire.

On arrival we saw NB Fleur and also NB North Star moored up. So we got settled kettle on, just as NB Tailsman II arrived. Nigel got out and helped Jim moor up just behind NB North Star just as the rain started to come down. We knew it was going to rain, but this was like a torrential downpour. Both boats ventured back inside until it had stopped.

As the rain came to a light drizzle we ventured back outside for a brew and chat with Gill and Jim from NB Tailsman II. They were waiting for NB Jabege II to arrive with Ruth and Mike on.

As we sat chatting the sun came out, so we had dinner, left over Domino's from the night before, and carried on chatting. A vehicle turned up on the green and started to empty the contents onto the grass. It was Tim from NB Sunbeam with Ruth and another member of their team to do a little garden maintenance. More about this in another article.

More chatting and being introduced to Ruth's poochie's a one of which was a Bedlington Terrier. I have never seen one of these before they were both lovely dogs and very well behaved just running up and down, following each other.

The one thing I would say about Whiteley Green, is that it is very relaxing. Just over the hill is the pub 'The Windmill'. We have not been, but I have heard good comments about it.

The sun came down even hotter as the afternoon went on. Tim and Ruth left and we carried on watching the boats go by. Some of us, mainly the men, were watching the hire boat parties go up and down, some comments which may make you blush were said, but everyone out on the cut was having fun.

By late afternoon, not long before we were due to go back, Ruth and Mike arrived on NB Jabege II. Again Nigel and Jim helping them moor up. We were asked to stay and join the two boats for a barbecue, but we had to get back to feed our boys, who would be pacing up and down the drive, as it would be past 4pm when we got back.. I am sure that Georgeeps and Garfeeps have watches on. These by the way are our two cats.

Anyway we set off back about 4ish for another relaxing journey back. Not many boat passed up going back and it had started to cool a little. We got back into the marina about 6.15ish. We had such a lovely relaxing day, I would recommend going to Whiteley Green to any member who has not yet been, and if you meet up with Gill, Jim, Ruth and Mike, you will have a giggle. They are so funny when they get together.



**Jim from Talisman II pulling faces at us (perhaps he was talking to Gill, see below Ed.)**



**Gill from NB Talisman II posing for the camera**





### **The lovely Ruth from the Cruiser Jabege II**

Anyway that's enough from me and I hope you enjoyed my little story. All my photos from today are on the club website [www.nccc.org.uk/gallery](http://www.nccc.org.uk/gallery) - just click on the box NB Royal Oscar trip to Whiteley Green



### **A Summary of the AWCC N.W. meeting, held at the Watch House C.C. Stretford, during the evening of Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2023**



The meeting was attended by fifteen people (three apologies) representing most of the clubs in the North-West Region.

A meeting with C & RT is scheduled to occur at Anderton during the afternoon of Friday 13<sup>th</sup> October where we propose to address some of the more pressing issues we are currently faced with.

Our Chairman has prepared the following report for the September meeting of the AWCC Executive which sums up the situation within our region.

#### **North-West Chairman's Report for AWCC Exec Meeting Sept 2023**

Compared to the same period last year, the months since the last AWCC Exec meeting in May 2023 and this report, the N-W canals have been relative quiet.

We were upset that even before the boating season had started C&RT were limiting lock passages in the Region. Some of these have been since lifted but they affected a lot of boaters for the second year in a row. It has also put off boaters from outside the Region from visiting our waterways, being unsure if they would be able to get back home.

Some areas have shown improvement this year in particular the Poolstock locks and pound have had very few problems, whereas others e.g. Marple, Bosley and Wigan flights continue to be badly affected.

The Anderton lift which had been closed is now open but only using one caisson. This means that passages up and down are limited and if the remaining caisson develops a fault the whole lift system has to be closed yet again.

Many of the usual problems still occur regularly: Paddles not working, lock gates not opening or closing fully, cills blown, culverts collapsing. Swing bridges although overall easier to use have a poor record of reliability, and landing stages are often inadequate, not being long enough for a 58' or 72' helmsman to be able to land without leaving the helm and running the length of the boat or having to climb along the gunnels.

Failure of any of the above inevitably results in closure of the whole canal in question.

Veg control and weed problems continue to be of major importance and are worse than ever with parts of the Leeds and Liverpool and the Trent and Mersey almost covered from bank to bank in weed.

In many places the towpath has been widened and covered in tarmac. Apart from costing millions of pounds, it has resulted in speeding bicycles, motorcycles and electric scooters tearing up the towpaths resulting in near accidents and a risk to walkers and children on bicycles. Why when all this money was being spent were traffic calming measures not put in place (sleeping policemen) perhaps every hundred metres or so?

Regional C&RT Matters:

Jon Horsfall the interim Regional Manager seems to be more amenable to AWCC worries, although we still have not had the promised meeting with CRT. We have emailed an agenda to Jon and hope to get the meeting held before the Weaver User group in November.

We felt that there should be at least two hours discussion as we had presented 23 topics at the last meeting and *none* had been adequately answered. We decided it was better to limit discussion to the ten most important and held a ballot to decide which of the ten it should be.

Unpowered craft in tunnels. We still have not had a test of narrowboat and canoe passage through two of the tunnels on the Trent and Mersey, which was postponed due to Covid in 2020, and we continue to press for it to take place.

We believe that the wearing of life-jackets, lights, and a whistle by paddleboarders and canoes should be mandatory for tunnels where they are allowed, and that prohibition notices and policing should be where there is no right of passage. The promised signs have at our tunnels have not been erected.

We have got no further with Wide beam boats on narrow canals and on wide canals two broad beam vessels being able to pass, as although the canal may look wide enough it is often not dredged deep enough for boats to pass.

Boater's facilities. CRT plans to have boater's facilities every few hours travelling time apart. In our Region there is a dire shortage of working water points, and of refuse facilities.

**Malcolm Holbrook, Chairman AWCC NW**

**Treasurers Report**

Current Account Balance £1601.32

Savings Account Balance £2920.26

Cash in hand £42-91

Membership cards and Burgees are available.

**Robin Telkman, Treasurer AWCC NW**

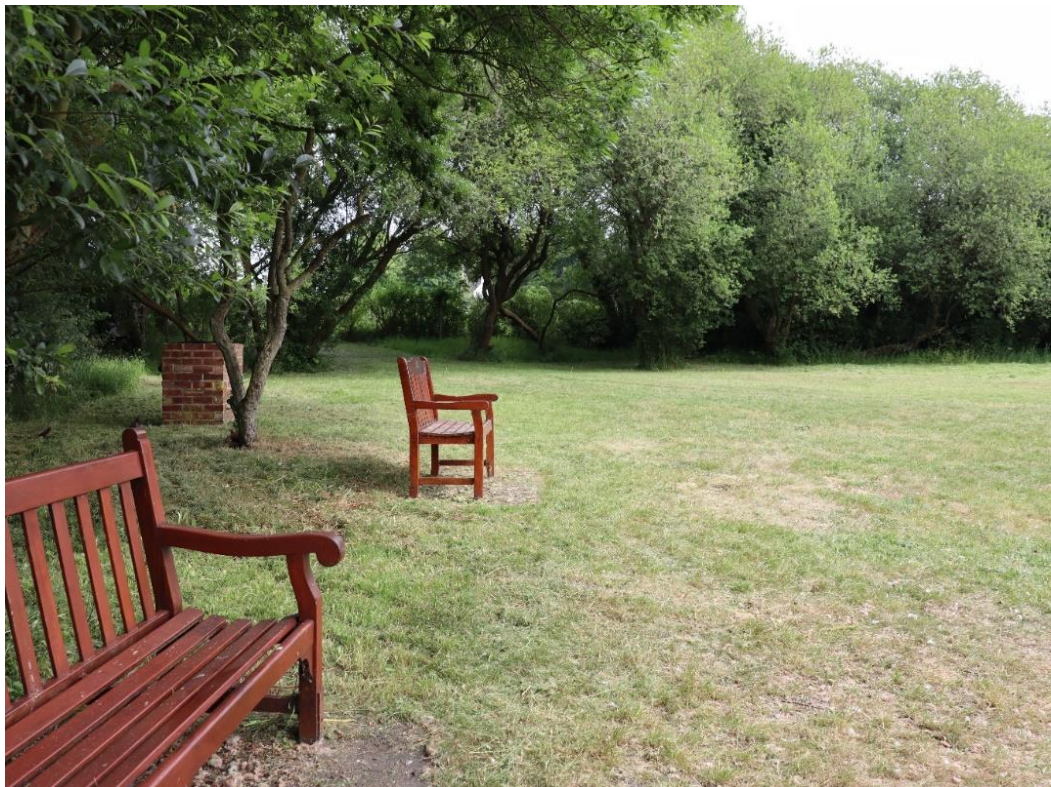
**Date of next mtg., Thurs. 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023; CRT-AWCC mtg. Fri 13<sup>th</sup> October 2023.**

**John Suggitt, Vice Chair AWCC North-West, AWCC Rep. for NCCC, N/B Evenlode**

### **A little Gardening at Whiteley Green**

What a lovely day it was on Saturday June 18, for a bit of gardening. Tim, Ruth from NB Sunbeam, with their son Kris came over to Whiteley Green for a touch of gardening. With lawnmower and strimmer at hand, they did their first run through on the Green and surrounds. Tim was on lawnmower duty and Kris was on strimmer duty. Don't worry this was a special strimmer which could cut up to the edge without causing any damage to the boats. Tim and the team will be back shortly for another run over, but it looks great.





There are a few pics here, but have a look at all the pics on our website [www.nccc.org.uk/gallery](http://www.nccc.org.uk/gallery) - click on the box 'A Little Gardening'

## Shropshire's Montgomery Canal Project 11<sup>th</sup> August 2023



**A bridge over the Montgomery Canal is beginning to take shape, marking the next stage for a project many years in the making.**

After more than six years of planning and fundraising, sections of the Schoolhouse Bridge have been moved into place, meaning that there is once more a Bridge 86 over the Montgomery Canal. Schoolhouse Bridge was the last highway blockage on the Shropshire section of the Montgomery Canal (after the previous one was demolished in the 1950's/60's) Michael Limbrey, Chairman of the Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust said "This has been a most exciting day. It is six years since we resolved to reconstruct Schoolhouse Bridge. We knew it we could do it this would be a significant contribution to open up the canal to the Welsh Border at Llanymynech. Now we can see a bridge for the first time in more than 60 years".

"The arches are in six sections, each having been prefabricated by 'Macrete' based in County Antrim, and delivered to site by a convoy of six flat-bed lorries. Each section was made of connected segments which form an arch shape were lifted onto cills on reinforced concrete abutments using a 250-ton crane".

"This means safeguarding the valued plants and wildlife and the canal-age locks, bridges, and other structures so that they do not become overgrown, decay, and lose all value".

He added "The restored canal can bring so many economic, social, and environmental benefits which other waterways have already achieved. It is that boost to the area that brought the UK Government funding for work in neighbouring Powys. In Shropshire, there are now just a couple of miles of dry canal to be restored. Our experienced volunteers are at work in the next section, and we have launched a new *Restore the Montgomery Canal!* Appeal to raise funds to provide equipment and materials. Supporters, both local and further afield, have generously donated for the bridge and are now supporting the next phase of the restoration. We are always pleased to receive donations at":

<https://localgiving.org/appeal/MontgomeryCanal>

**Thanks to Nick Culliford, AWCC NW Secretary for providing this information.**

**Lock 7 Marple 7 August 2023 at 08-15am.**

The Lock Flight had been closed early in August due to this Lock being declared unsafe.



**Photograph No. 1**

**Photograph No. 1** There is no sign of any collapsed masonry here but the run of the coping stones on this side of the ladder is irregular. This is apparent from **Photograph No's 2 & 3** which suggest recent movement of the second coping stone to the right of the ladder.



**Photograph No. 2**



**Photograph No. 3**

Photograph No. 4



Whilst I last ascended this Lock Flight on the morning of May 29th, 2019 (shortly after the Lock 11 rebuild), I made notes at each Lock. Here is the entry for Lock 7:  
*'Entered Lock 08-14am, 2-inch lip evident on near side coping stone near ladder. Slight leak at Top gate. Lock chamber slightly splayed (as built?). Cleared Lock 08-21am'*. The fresh marks to the inner faces of the two coping stones next to the ladder (**Photograph No. 3**) suggest that perhaps these have been struck by a boat ascending the lock carelessly or entering the Lock too fast. Food for thought?





**Photograph No. 5**



**Photograph No. 6**

**Conclusion.** No doubt some rebuilding work is required but surely **not a prolonged closure?** John Suggitt, August 2023.

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

### **Solution to Summer Edition Brain Teaser**

The two severely angled bridges on the Macclesfield canal are bridge 26 (Bollington) and bridge 44 (Sutton) which is the more severe and a testimony to the skill of those involved in its construction. No doubt these techniques were invaluable to those who subsequently built our railway viaducts.

Moorings within the Club Arm may be coming available. Please contact our Moorings Officer **Dave Hood**, telephone number **07825 335146 / 07837 542115**.

When re-licensing your boat, would you kindly do so through the Club as we will benefit financially. For further information on the current procedure, please contact our Licensing Officer **Jaqui Kilburn**, telephone number **0161 442 6353 / 07714 352991**



NCCC



**VOLUNTEERS**



**REQUIRED TO**

**ASSIST WITH THE**

**RUNNING OF THE BAR**

**PLEASE CONTACT LYNDSEY HILLMAN**

### **LAST BUT NOT LEAST!**

**Lock Restrictions on both the Macclesfield and Peak Forest Canals  
Some good news and some bad!**

**There are no restrictions on the Bosley Flight at present (Sept. 2023) but the  
Marple Flight is closed (for information on this, see elsewhere in this edition).**

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