

DITCHCRAWLER 80TH ANNIVERSARY PART 2

CELEBRATING THE PAST WITH A SPOTLIGHT ON THE FUTURE



A unique celebration

Happy 80th Birthday North Cheshire Cruising Club!

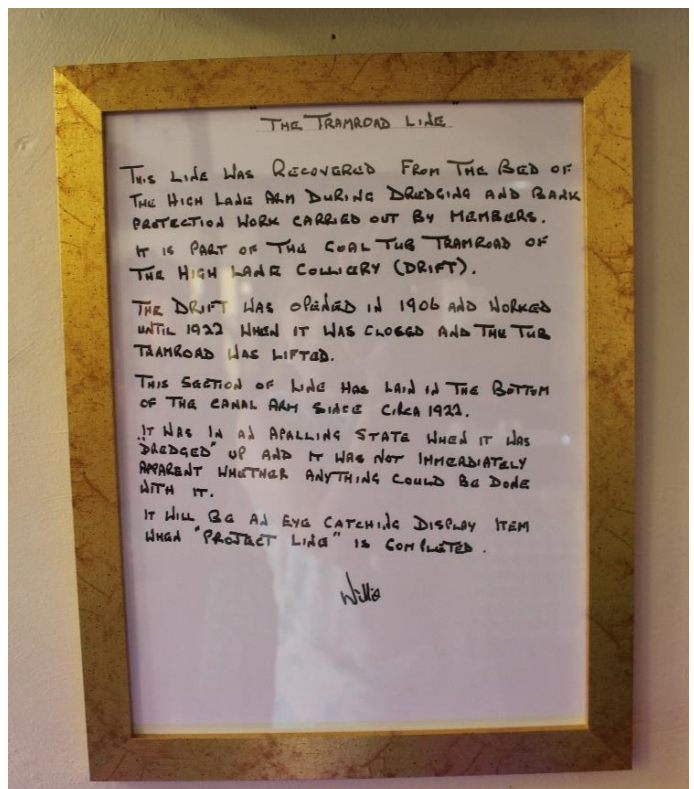
CELEBRATING THE PAST WITH A SPOTLIGHT ON THE FUTURE

The North Cheshire Cruising Club's 80th anniversary event also provided us with an opportunity to celebrate the historic heritage of the Arm that we all call home and look forward to a bright and prosperous future for our Club. In addition to the unveiling of Ian Spooner's expertly hand-crafted plaque, covered in the earlier edition of the Ditchcrawler, there was also an unveiling of the drift mine tram rail discovered by members of the club during piling activity and lovingly conserved by Willie Walker.



We were delighted and honoured that the Club's President Lord Stunell was able to attend and "pull the ribbon" to unveil the permanent display of the tram rail in the Club room. We very much look forward to welcoming Lord Stunell again in the future.

The Club room display also includes the original hand-written information sheet about the tram rail by Willie Walker, club Director and Archivist, who sadly passed away whilst planning our 80th Celebrations. Happily, his plans were continued by the Organising Committee and Heather Rowley, who gave a short talk to the invited guests about the tram rail's history and conservation then went on to outline NCCC's ideas for the Club going forward.





In addition to Lord Stunell, the other invited guests included Ian Edgar MBE and Sarah Edgar (Bugsworth Basin Heritage Trust), Stuart Mills (Property Director, Canal and River Trust) and Adam and Cath Baxter (Willie's family members), pictured here with Dave Hood, Mike Robison and Heather Rowley.

The guests were treated to a tour of the Arm on their way to board the charity boat the Mary Sunley. During the walk the extensive works undertaken by club members, such as piling, dredging, removal of the boathouses and the general upkeep of the Arm were explained and our vision for the future discussed.

We were privileged to have the opportunity to show the Arm to such a high profile member of the CRT Board, in Stuart Mills, and it was reported that he was very impressed with the scale and proficiency of the work undertaken. Indeed, he was so impressed that he offered help and support from CRT for future projects. We are delighted to be developing these closer ties between the Club and CRT going forward.

The guests then enjoyed a short cruise on the beautiful Macclesfield Canal, accompanied by Heather Rowley, Chris Potter, our longest serving member of 56 years, and other members of the Cruising Club. This provided an ideal opportunity to outline the Club's hopes and aspirations for further development of the NCCC.



A REAL TEAM EFFORT



Preparations for the 80th Celebratory Event were a true team effort. A brigade of volunteers rallied throughout the week before to tidy, garden, clean and smarten up the Arm for members and invited guests. Mike Robison organised a team of gardeners and willing helpers; Pam Russell, Gill Ling and Ruth Sellars rallied their team of helpers making the seating arrangements and dressing the tables in the Club room; Mike Hodgkinson restored and repainted the flagpole ready to display the club burgee and Union Jack and Heather Stanley used her professional contacts to get us a great deal on printing all the signs, name tags and lovely souvenir invitations and was the event photographer on the day.

The rest of the Organising Committee worked hard behind the scenes, meeting regularly to ensure the event ran smoothly – thanks for all your hard work everyone, the list of contributors just goes on and on but you all know who you are!

And a special thanks to the Mary Sunley Trust for their help on the day, we were proud and delighted to present a £100 cheque to the Trust later in the afternoon.



Ian Spooner's contribution has been widely celebrated but it is worth another mention to congratulate him on producing the plaque which will be a lasting record of the event. The Club's commemorative plaque is a real testament to Ian's skill and craftsmanship, the likes of which are a rarity in this modern era and the plaque looked rather resplendent with its gold leaf.

Due to the contributions of so many people it is not always possible to highlight all individual efforts so I do apologise wholeheartedly if your contribution has not been featured. It was, after all, a massive team effort!

THE TRAM RAIL DISPLAY

The tram rail, which is now displayed so proudly in our club house, is an excellent survivor from what was known as the Southern Branch of the High Lane Arm. The tram track itself ran towards Middlewood and Norbury Pits and was used to transport “coal tubs” which were rolled onto the decks of specialist barges and they were rolled off again at High Lane. The High Lane Arm was significant in its canal heyday, for handling enormous tonnages of manufactured goods, raw materials, coal and agricultural produce.



The rail was discovered many years ago by club volunteers during dredging operations and discarded only to be rediscovered years later by Mike Robison’s van tyre which it slashed! He dug it out so that it wouldn’t damage his van again and, after discussion with other club members, all concluded that it was fit for nothing more than cutting up and using as ballast for his boat. However, when discussing this over late night brandies with Willie Walker, Willie got very excited, asked to see the rail and then pronounced “well, that’s my next project”. He knew the story of the rail being found but did not realise it had been discarded along with the dredgings outside the Club boundary fence. The two of them brought the rail down to the workshop where Willie set about the time consuming work of conserving it for future display.



Dave Hood, former submariner and now Club joiner, was involved in the original discussions with Willie regarding his plans for how to display the rail in its “natural” state. Willie also envisaged including a timeline of the early history of the Wharf, the drift mine and the Arm, leading up to the Club formation and its key milestones to the present day. This element will be added in the fullness of time keeping not only our history alive but also the historical heritage of the Wharf which played a central part in Stockport’s industrial past.

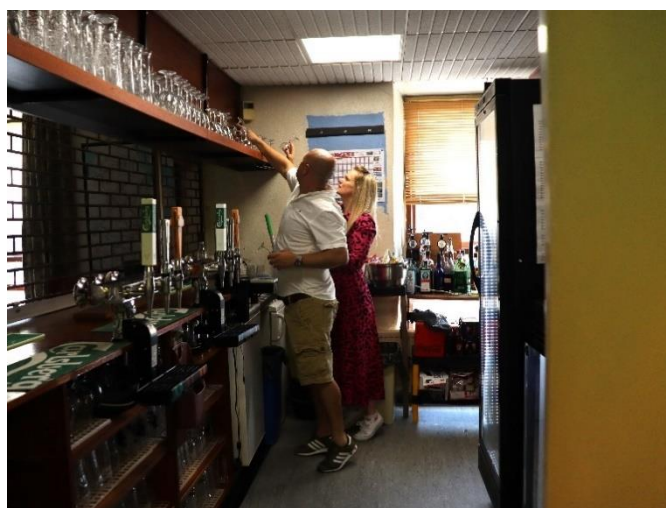
Dave, despite being a self-confessed DIY joiner at best, volunteered to construct a freestanding frame for the rail after concerns that the wall may not be able to support the weight. The frame was constructed to sit over an existing radiator and there is still a little work to do to allow more heat to get through but I think all can agree that the display is very fitting and does indeed portray the rail in a representation of its original use. Mike finished the display by mounting the rail in its realistic setting with gravel background and varnishing the wood. I think they did the club and Willie’s rail proud.

AFTERNOON TEA ANYONE?

The afternoon tea was very much appreciated by all members and guests which was so expertly delivered by Pam Russell and the kitchen team. The lovely sandwiches, selection of cakes and cream scones were a real treat and I am sure we all agree that the rousing and uplifting music from the Union Chapel Jazz Band was perfect.

Lyndsay saw an opportunity to open the bar early which was greatly appreciated by members as it was such a lovely hot day. The bar remained open as long as people wanted to stay and reminisce, brilliantly staffed by Lyndsay and her merry band of volunteers.

It was a real pleasure to welcome so many members of Stoke Boat Club and it was a great honour to receive their symbolic gift in celebration of our "Oak" anniversary.



WILLIE WALKER

Willie Walker, club Director and Archivist, was appointed by the Board to organise our 80th Anniversary Celebrations. Willie saw this as an opportunity to celebrate the club's rich history but also to further promote the club locally and wider afield in the hope of securing a more prosperous future for the club and its members. Sadly, Willie passed away whilst planning the event, however he had been working closely with a number of club members and directors and, of course, Heather Rowley. Thanks to the early work undertaken by Willie the club, with the help of the organising committee and Heather, was able to put on a most memorable day, celebrating our heritage and looking forward to the future.

Willie's idea was to embrace our heritage with the hope of securing a brighter future and details of how this might be achieved will be, I'm sure, discussed more fully in the future.

THE CLUB PROFILE

This wonderful event proved to be a great opportunity for re-establishing the club's profile with the local community and also wider afield, particularly with the Canal and River Trust. Members may already have seen the coverage in *Waterways World* and *Towpath Talk* but, if you haven't, take a look at the Club noticeboards where we will display some of our publicity.

It is widely accepted that furthering our links with the local community is vital for the Club's future going forward, particularly if we wish to secure third party funding, and the features in local press such as the *Marple* and *High Peak Reviews* can only help with this.

SOME MEMORIES OF THE DAY





A BIG THANKS to everyone who helped and to all those who attended, making this such a memorable and enjoyable day. Please send your own memories of the day to the Ditchcrawler editor who I am sure will be grateful to receive any and all contributions.

Ditchcrawler Special Edition editors – Tim & Ruth Smith