

STAFFORD RIVERWAY LINK

(A Community Interest Company)

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NEWSLETTER Number 21

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Patron:- The Lord Stafford, DL, FRAGS

President:- David Kidney

Vice President:- Jeremy Lefroy MP

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.

Newsletter No 21 November 2014

Hello to all our Riverway Link members and enthusiasts,

It is some months since I put together a newsletter. Summer, as always, was a boating period but this year this extended, for me, into the autumn – only in a different way. I was lucky enough to be away on a cruise, of the sea – not – canal type, for much of October and then the catching up of life in general took precedence. However, there is now lots to relate as the autumn meant a return to work-parties so read on!

‘ Chairmans report:

Since the last newsletter we are making slow but progressive progress towards our end Goal.

We are currently waiting for comments on the engineering brief that we have sent to Halcrow. As soon as we get their reply we will ask them to proceed with as much info as we can afford at this stage. We still need to obtain funding to take this survey and the next surveys, that we have to complete, to conclusions that will enable us to start work on the connection. So if anyone can help with the funding aspect I would be most grateful.

On another point John Mountford and I visited the Town Centre and met with the Principal in charge of the current regeneration development. He was kind enough to take us out to the site and gave us an overview as to how it will look when completed. He can see no reason at present why we could not at some stage in the future build a turning point for boats at the point where the paving slabs (The Duck Steps) are which would actually provide something to look at for the people frequenting the cafes that are to be

built next to the cinema, which will also face in the River direction. We felt that when the building work is completed in 2016 it will provide excellent facilities for visiting boaters bearing in mind we have to devise what and where the moorings will be. We felt that the developments will certainly encourage people to come to Stafford Town Centre.

At the last work party we uncovered a large part of the original Lockhouse which was very exciting and I can only encourage you to come to these parties and enjoy the camaraderie (And Coffee !!! or Tea)

We are now using our latest acquisition (A Caravan) to provide somewhere to base the work parties. We currently tow this to the site on the day and would encourage any volunteers with suitable vehicles to take a turn at this task. Our work parties are starting to get more attendees, but we still need more, to enable some of us to take a break.

Finally the Signpost we intend to put up in the early part of next year is nearing completion and looking very good.

Thanks for taking the time to read this and I look forward to seeing you at a work party or presentation somewhere, in the future.

There have been three work-parties so far this autumn and attendance is rising. At the latest one on November 15th, 15 members turned up and spent a very productive morning. Whether the increase in numbers is due to there now being a very nice little caravan on site providing a more comfortable ‘rest’ area when it’s time for coffee and biscuits or to the fact that the work itself is becoming exceedingly interesting I don’t know. We have also made the work-parties a little more professional in that we provide a health and safety

sheet and also ask those attending to 'sign in'. This may prove beneficial as we may be able to access "matched funding" money for the project in the future. Each hour of work recorded counts as money we have put into the restoration. 15 of us putting in four hours of voluntary 'work' begins to mount up. It's a real bonus when the work is so much fun. So what has been going on As well as 'manpower', we have had 'machine power', with little JCB diggers and dumpers on site. This enabled more clearing of the original basin to be undertaken. It really does look as if something is happening now. As ever there has been the on-going maintenance of the new hedges and the unearthing of bricks which, if whole, are being saved for re-use, or relegated to rubble. BUT – and this is the most exciting BUT – some bricks were unearthed which were attached to other bricks. Instead of moving them we began gently scraping around them and it seemed that the foundations of the old lock cottage had been found. On the last work-party there was much speculation along with more definite knowledge from our historians as to which direction the wall might head and whether it was the cottage or the nearby pigsty that had been located. Documents and plans and photos were consulted. We spent the time even more gently scraping and prodding and eventually a whole length of wall was revealed, corner to corner and thus the beginning of the two adjoining walls AND some lovely tiled flooring! Do watch for the date of the next work party and come and see for yourselves history being unearthed and be a part of the restoration of our waterway heritage.

Now a 'thank you' to David Jones for the following:

History Update

Information about the history of the River Sow Navigation / Stafford Branch Canal is to be found on the History Page of the SRL Website. Much of what appears is my original research and I have also transcribed some primary sources.

Recent uploads include:

- several historic **Ordnance Survey Maps** of the Stafford Area between 1880 and 1938. The whole navigation from Baswich into Stafford is covered and the zoom facility can be used to

focus on the route in detail. The link to these maps is courtesy of the National Library of Scotland.

an article about the life of the infamous **Omar Hall** by the well-known Stafford historian Roy Lewis. Omar Hall was involved in promoting the Tramway from Radford to Stafford in 1805 and also in the ill-fated attempt to link Stafford to the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal using the River Sow in 1811. After a spell in Warwick Gaol and sentenced to seven years transportation to

Australia, he eventually died in Stafford in 1833. His epitaph in *The Staffordshire Advertiser* was "Formerly a banker in Stafford, Mr Hall suffered a sad reverse of fortune".

Several new articles will be uploaded onto the SRL Website over the next few weeks, so do keep an eye on the Website. One of these is the story of William Sambrook and his Family. William was the longest serving Lockkeeper at Baswich and lived at the Lock House from about 1849 to 1875 and again from about 1886 until 1889. Watch this space.

David Jones
SRL History & Research

Future Work Parties.

If you have useful tools please do bring them. We particularly need some sieves – but not too fine. Even chicken wire would do! How about a metal detector anybody?!

The next date planned is December 6th, weather permitting. Cold is not too much of a problem as we work hard to keep warm but too much rain is likely to make the conditions underfoot unsuitable.

We won't have the boat on that occasion – we are facing the wrong way and with no winding hole close by we need it to be facing the direction of our next planned trip – heading towards the Trent and Mersey for a Christmas break.....

.....on that note, and bearing in mind there won't be another newsletter for a month or so

HAPPY and JOYOUS FESTIVITIES

TO YOU ALL!