

Canal Connections

Winter 2022/23



**THE NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS
OF THE MONMOUTHSHIRE, BRECON &
ABERGAVENNY CANALS TRUST (MBACT)**

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT by REVD. JOHN COLLIER



Dear Friends

As we start a new year, this is a good time to reflect on the previous year. Coming out of Covid we can see that there are a number of positive things, but it would be remiss of us to assume that all went well and to plan. The essence of progress is that we learn from our 'challenges'.

On the bright side the boats had an extremely successful season. A few issues with batteries and paint, but all now resolved thanks to the hard work put in by our boat managers Dianne and Steve, led by Glyn, and all the volunteers who give of their time to crew the boats week in week out as well as spending day upon day carrying out the maintenance necessary to keep the boats safe and compliant. Thank you all. We must make a special thank you to Bob Coldwell for his wise counsel and help. Ian stood down as director during the year and his expertise will be sorely missed.

Ty Coch has benefitted from a visit by the Waterways Recovery Group (WRG). Thanks to Richard for organising this. The work they undertook supplements the work done by Luke and his team every Saturday morning keeping the site maintained.

We continue to benefit from the activities at Fourteen Locks and Laura and Jodie with the support of the volunteer team. The lease is due for renewal in 2023, and we hope that Newport Council will be able to continue their support for this important community resource. Activity trails have been successful again this year and brought many visitors to the canal, no doubt enjoying what it has to offer. Huong Ha resigned as assistant manager, and we will miss her there, but wish her every success in her studies and future career.

Membership is important, obviously from an income perspective but more importantly the support that Trust members give to the Directors. With over 380 paid up members we can demonstrate to Councils and funding bodies that we do have a serious body of interest in our work. Thanks to Anne for all she has done to sort the membership. Since January 2022, Anne has also taken over production of this e-newsletter for MBACT members and volunteers.

As I reported in the last newsletter we have been trying to arrange a strategy workshop for directors and senior managers. This has not proved possible because of the time everyone was already giving in their respective areas. Hopefully things will slow down a little in the New Year and we will be able to find a suitable date. I did promise results and a plan which I was going to share in this newsletter, but I ask for your patience – can I reassure you this is delayed not abandoned.



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MBACT directors continue to work with the various councils and CRT, and I also thank our volunteers for highlighting issues which need addressing, particularly on the Crumlin Arm. The water is an ongoing problem, but we continue to work toward addressing the issue.

We are beginning to develop a promotion strategy, and now have a PowerPoint presentation which was delivered recently to Goytre and Penperlleni WI. Leaflets have been produced to support this, and we are beginning to look at promotional materials to update and improve them. Requests for talks can be made through the website.

We are in the process of appointing a volunteer education officer to work with schools. We are hoping that the successful candidate will develop resources which can be used at various sites along the canal, hopefully to include the Lord Raglan.

In our Post Covid post Brexit world things are different - and MBACT is not immune from the need to change. Hopefully we will emerge into 2023 and beyond stronger and more resilient so that we can succeed in our objective for a well maintained and well used Mon and Brecon.

John.

RESTORATION AND REGENERATION NEWS

Since our last newsletter in June we have continued to be busy working with the canal owners (CRT, Newport City Council, Caerphilly County Borough Council and Torfaen County Borough Council).

We had been hoping to resurrect the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals Regeneration Partnership Group to facilitate cross boundary coordination and restoration. The purpose of this Group is to ensure that the canal owners are working together to coordinate their efforts. This Group has not yet met again, but John our Chairman has a strong desire to re-establish the Group and he is working to set up this Group again. Even though the Group is dormant we have set up regular meetings with individual Councils who have been working on the ground with their immediate Council neighbours. This cooperation has been almost exclusively at an engineering level. However, we believe that a more strategic, higher level, partnership will bring benefits to the whole canal and we will continue to push for this.

We have been working closely with Torfaen CBC. Alice, the Torfaen Canal Officer, continues to bring a real focus to our work with them. The Torfaen CBC Canal Working Group has met several times and we continue to work with the Bridge 46 to Five Locks Canal Group as part of this as well.

Torfaen's draft strategy for the canal is to focus on extending the navigation from Five Locks to Cwmbran Town Centre. We strongly endorse and support this approach, though we are also concerned that other parts of the canal such as at Ty Coch and Pentre Lane may be neglected if all

the work and money is targeted at Five Locks. There will be a public consultation on the canal strategy by Torfaen CBC over the next two months and we would encourage you to respond to the consultation. We will publish the details on our website and our social media. We are encouraged that Torfaen CBC is working on a strategy for the canal through north Cwmbran although we strongly believe that the timescale (of over 10 years) for restoration of a relatively short section of the canal



Lock 43, Brake lock at Ty Coch, Cwmbran

is much too long. We will continue to lobby for what we feel would be a more realistic timescale.

We have been working for some time on a concept for a proposed waterways park at Ty Coch. The proposal was for a new balance pond and a possible visitor centre on Torfaen Council owned land near the previously restored Ty Coch locks. We had

been looking for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) towards this. However, this potential funding application was put on hold due to Covid. We have recently decided that we would not proceed with a funding application for this conceptual project so that we could support Torfaen's focus on restoring the canal into Cwmbran town centre. We will continue to work with Torfaen CBC on maintaining the area at Ty Coch and we have an excellent volunteer team working there.

Richard Dommett MBE has stepped back from representing the Trust on the Caerphilly CBC canal members working group. John, our Chairman has stepped into that role. We are working with Caerphilly CBC on how we can help them bring more focus to the maintenance of the canal through the Caerphilly County area.

We continue to respond to various planning applications that may affect the navigable and non-navigable parts of the canal. We had previously worked with and advised Newport City Council on a proposal for a new towpath access bridge adjacent to lock 34 Gwasted Mawr Lock in Malpas. However, we felt that the new design in the planning application wasn't really suitable to be in close proximity to a lock which is Listed for its historic and visual importance, and we responded to the planning application as such. The design was based on structures found on other canals and didn't reflect the design of existing bridges on the Mon & Brec. A decision hasn't yet been made by the planning authority.

We also responded to a planning application for a large extension to the former lock keepers cottage at Ty Fynnon Lock at Newport. Whilst welcoming the re-use of the building, we did not feel that the design on the extension fitted in with the historic property and canal Conservation Area. The application was refused.

A planning application had been made for a car parking hard-stand within the lock chamber of derelict lock 52 on Greenhill Road in Cwmbran. We responded to this application along with our friends at the Bridge 46 to Five Locks Canal Group. We submitted a detailed policy objection to the granting of the application. We argued that the proposal, if allowed, would prejudice the planned restoration of the canal. If the Council were not minded to refuse the application, our Trust also suggested an alternative temporary consent, coupled with detailed conditions, which would allow the applicant to retain the hardstanding until restoration was undertaken. In the event, the Council took the decision to refuse consent.

We also responded to a consultation by Caerphilly County Borough Council on a proposed candidate site allocation for housing in their new Local Development Plan. The site lies between the canal and Risca Road at Penyfan Farm in Rogerstone. Again we focused on the potential impact on the canal and registered an objection.



The canal at Rogerstone lacking water, summer 2022

The ongoing issues of the lack of water on the canal continued through the summer. We have raised the issue in May 2021, May 2022 and again in August 2022. Newport City Council and Caerphilly County Borough Council responded to our concerns. The issue and the Councils' responses were picked up by the local press. Although there have been no structural changes the two Councils have been more proactive in working together to try and improve water flow down the canal. We will keep our members informed of the proposed initiatives as they are implemented.

Additionally here at MBACT we have a new volunteer engineer who is working with us and the Councils to spot and rectify problems. We have also set up a regular meeting with Newport City Council officers to advise them of where we think work can be done to improve the structure and water flow in the canal. It's still early days but we believe that this focused approach will help in going forward. We are grateful for members of the public and local residents who continue to raise issues

and concerns with the Councils. It does make a difference. You can find more information on the water shortages and why it happens on our website at <https://mbact.org.uk/news/>.

We also continue to work with the Canal and River Trust / Glandŵr Cymru (CRT) on the navigable section of the canal. We contacted CRT about bridge 100 which CRT planned to do winter maintenance work on. This bridge is one of the lowest on the canal and we met with CRT to try and convince them that the bridge should be raised as part of the maintenance. Our new volunteer engineer was also involved. However, CRT's budget was extremely limited for this work and it was clear that even though the CRT local operation team agreed with the issue it was highly unlikely that funds would be available from the national CRT budget.

Newport City Council (NCC) are carrying out work along the Crumlin Arm of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal to remove trees which have been infected by ash dieback. They will be working between December 2022 and March 2023. Council contractors have been working on the canal between Pontymason Lane, and the path that connects Risca Road to Pontymason Lane. However, there are affected trees elsewhere along the canal such as down the side of the Fourteen Locks (Cefn) flight. Although it's upsetting seeing mature trees being cut down it is essential that this disease is controlled. There is also a risk to the public in that affected trees may fall over the towpath. The Council are also using the opportunity to prune and cut out any other trees in the area that they are working in that are affecting the towpath or canal.

MBACT COMMUNITY BOATS

News from the Community Boats by Glyn Williams, Operations Director

At Goytre we have had most probably one of our most successful years to date. Both boats, "Edith Elizabeth" and "The Lord Raglan", ran through April until the end of October keeping the crews extremely busy.

The Lord Raglan came out of the water in May 2022 at Heron's Rest Marina and renewed its safety certificate to operate on the canal. Since then it has entertained some very diverse



The Lord Raglan at Herons Rest Marina

organisations, such as schools, various MS Societies, Church Groups, Ukrainian Families, vulnerable adults and many private birthday parties, and even two television stars.

The volunteer crews were, as always, helpful and welcoming the general public during week days and weekends.

The Edith Elizabeth continued to be the main attraction this year, especially with the children. This open boat allows the crews to explain and point out several interesting points along the canal and help the public get to know a little about the area. On the Edith Elizabeth this year, we have had



Passengers enjoying the Edith Elizabeth at Goytre Wharf

guests from China, Holland, Canada, the USA, Germany, Norway, Spain and many other foreign visitors, who have come to visit Monmouthshire and especially the Canal.

Both boats are operated by volunteer crews who give up their time to allow people to experience just how wonderful the canal really is.

The helmsmen are all qualified and the crews are given extensive training to ensure the safety of all our passengers and to make certain that everyone enjoys their trip on the canal.

We were delighted this year to become an accredited training centre for the National Community Boat Association thanks to Volunteer Steve Wride attaining the Train to Train qualification.

Heartfelt thanks are given to Bob Coldwell, the electrician, who works tirelessly on the boats to keep them operational.

Looking forward to this next year with several new volunteers, we hope to provide an even better experience for all our passengers.

Glyn Williams

Operations Director



**Monmouthshire, Brecon &
Abergavenny Canals Trust**

Charter the Lord Raglan

work away-days, meetings, school visits, special occasions

Disability-friendly - space for 2 wheelchairs



Glyn 01633 892167



boats@mbact.org.uk

<https://mbact.org.uk/our-boats/>



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Fourteen Locks Canal Centre

Fourteen Locks Canal Centre 2022 Report

The year started with Covid restrictions back in place and while this was not a shutdown it had an impact as a one-way system had to be put in place, mask wearing was mandatory and the facilities needing regular sanitising between uses. Staff and volunteers coped admirably ensuring that the Centre was kept as safe as possible for visitors and staff. Our volunteers have worked tirelessly for the centre and we now have a group of Duke of Edinburgh students every Wednesday; the Countryside Volunteers are doing outstanding work on the canal as well as volunteers every day in the Centre manning the information desk.



Some of our visitors enjoying our Halloween trail

The information desk has been busy especially during the summer months when the heatwave caused the pond and surrounds to dry up. The pond was almost empty of water. This led to huge issues with visitors thinking there were leaks or other problems. It also caused the fauna to grow rapidly giving the misconception that MBACT and Newport City Council were adding to the neglect. There was also much concern for the fish and wildfowl. The heavy autumn rains have rectified this, and the pond is now so full that the wheel of the dragonfly sculpture is almost covered. There is an invasive species in the lower pound below lock 19 that is being dealt with, and several trees are being removed due to ash dieback.

We said farewell to Huong Ha one of our assistant managers in August, and we wish her well in her studies. We are looking at replacing her, but Jodie and Laura are filling in for the time being until we recruit to the post.

Visitor numbers are back to pre-Covid times and this year we had 65,436 visitors to the centre, the highest number in the recorded history of the Centre. As well as a core group of regulars we have had visitors from far and wide to the Centre and lock flight. We have had a group from America and individuals from Australia, Korea, Japan, Falkland Islands and well as England, Scotland and Ireland. One of the visitors was a writer for Rough Guide so we are hoping to see the Centre and the Fourteen Locks in the next edition of Rough Guide to Wales.



Huong being presented with flowers on her last day

The Cefn meeting room is back in use and is booked out regularly, supplementing our income. The meeting room is often booked out for training with local companies. It has also been used to host children's craft days and these have been very successful running alongside other holiday activities for children which have included trails and pebble painting. The log circle is also used weekly.

The Centre hosted a polling station for the local elections.



2022 has been a productive year for crafters and artists in our shop and sales have been good. Changes have been made to the layout of the shop and foyer area and further changes will be made in 2023.

Santa spent some time at the Centre just before Christmas. This was highly successful with over 150 children visiting Santa's grotto.



Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust

We have applied for several grants and been successful. We had particular success with the Participatory budgeting (PB) funding application which involved putting together a video, our camcorder group assisted with this, and when it went to a public vote - we won.

We also appreciated a substantial grant from WCVA towards the Centre and MBACT volunteer related activities.

The centre is now an official Keep Wales Tidy litter picking hub. We were also awarded a garden package from Keep Wales Tidy which includes 2 raised beds and several bird boxes and other items to encourage wildlife to the area.

There have been some maintenance issues at the Centre over the past year which have been addressed and the Centre is now fully compliant with all checks being carried out to a high standard. The energy crisis is having an impact and is something that needs close monitoring over the coming year.

The Fourteen Locks shop made an operating profit in 2022. This will be donated to the main MBACT fund, to be used for the MBACT activities in campaigning for restoration of the Mon and Brec canal.

We are pleased that Phil Hughes, our archivist, has taken on the role of Fourteen Locks Heritage Officer. Phil will be working on cataloguing the museum contents and advising and helping with carrying out a much needed 'spruce up'.

This coming May will be the 15th anniversary of MBACT managing the Fourteen Locks Canal Centre and using it as our Headquarters. We are planning a celebration of this milestone.



Installing our new raised beds

Summary of the Annual General Meeting, November 2022

MBACT held its Annual General Meeting on 24th November 2022. It was a hybrid meeting with nine members present in the Cwmbran Community Council Offices and six members joining online via Zoom.

Rev. John Collier, Chairman, welcomed everyone warmly to the meeting, including The Hon. Lord Mike German, OBE, President of MBACT.

John Collier reported that 2022 had been a better year for MBACT with increased levels of activity, compared to the two previous years of the Covid pandemic. However the year was not without its

challenges. Post-Covid recovery grants from Newport County Council and the WCVA had been received very gratefully. John Collier has implemented a “hub” management approach within MBACT but there still needs to be better communications within MBACT internally.

A lot of work has been done on improving and maintaining the Lord Raglan Community Boat. Trips on The Lord Raglan and the Edith Elizabeth have raised over £7,000 for the Trust.

MBACT is working actively with many partners including: the Bridge 46 to Five Locks Canal Group and the Torfaen Partnership Group. MBACT Directors are building partnerships with Newport and Caerphilly Councils. Another area of progress is the setting up of a working group on the Crumlin Arm. This will complement the work that Luke and his team do at Ty Coch.

Discussions are being held regarding plans for two or three Waterways Recovery Group (WRG) projects. This includes discussions with the Bridge 46 to Five Locks Canal Group and with Torfaen Council. The application for the Heritage Lottery Funding for Ty Coch has been withdrawn.

The Chairman thanked all the MBACT volunteers for their excellent work and emphasised that their work is essential to the existence and survival of MBACT. Paul Thomas has recently assumed overall responsibility at Director level for MBACT’s volunteers and is working closely with WCVA on good practice and training for MBACT Directors.

Jayne Collier summarised key points from the Annual Report and the Accounts for the Year Ending 31st December 2021 for the meeting, which were approved unanimously. Jayne Collier has moved MBACT accounts into a modern accounting system (Xero) during 2021.

Wyn Mitchell, John Collier and Bob Coldwell were all re-elected as MBACT Committee Members. Dianne Wilkinson was elected as a new Member. There are still 3 vacancies on the Committee for ordinary members.

Nigel Curtis, Chairman of the Canal Operators Group (COG); Tony Pugh, IWA representative; David Morgan CRT representative; and Hugh Woodford, representative of the Torfaen Canal Team were all re-confirmed as Committee Members. Alisdair Kirkpatrick, Beacon Park Boats, was invited to join the Committee as a Member Representative.

It is proposed that a representative of the Bridge 46 to Five Locks Canal Group be invited to join the Committee. This may need a change to the constitution but was accepted in principle.

Any Other Business: Alasdair Kirkpatrick, Beacon Park Boats, said that the canal business community are keen to work more closely with MBACT.



Social Evening for MBACT Volunteers, July 2022

MBACT volunteers are what keeps our Trust running and we were pleased to have a social evening in July at Penelope's Café at Goytre Wharf.

It was well attended with volunteers from all areas of the Trust as well as Laura, Huong and Jodie from the Fourteen Locks Canal Centre.



Some of our volunteers enjoying the sun at Goytre Wharf

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN BECOMING AN MBACT VOLUNTEER?

There is an extensive list of volunteering work that we need help with and you will be able to find a role that fits: your interests and experience; your available spare time; or will teach you new skills in a friendly and supportive environment.

We welcome all offers of assistance whether you: enjoy nature and the outdoors; are passionate about canals and canal restoration; enjoy boats; enjoy talking to the public in a community centre; can undertake administrative work remotely from your home; or simply willing to lend your voice to our campaigns or help us to run a professional canal charity.

You will find us a very friendly and welcoming group of canal enthusiasts.

If you can spare some time, please visit the MBACT website at:

<https://mbact.org.uk/volunteering-opportunities/> and fill in our Volunteer Contact form. Alternatively scan this QR code which will also take you to the volunteering part of our website.



We look forward to hearing from you.



Open Day at Beacon Park Boats, Saturday 28th January 2023

One of our business members Beacon Park Boats is holding an Open Day at their boathouse in Llangattock, on Saturday 28th January 2023, 10am until 4pm.

It's free to visit and you will be able to see inside their hire boats, and how they build their boats in their workshop.

Weather permitting they will be running boat trips on their new electric boat "Robin" for a small fee.

We will have a stall at the event staffed by our volunteers. Come along and have a chat if you have any questions about membership, volunteering with us, or if you wish to know more about the canal and the work that we are doing.



Beacon Park Boats marina

A HUGE THANK YOU TO OUR MEMBERSHIP

We are very grateful for the support of our Members.

As a Member of the Trust you are helping to ensure that the canal is cherished and restored for the enjoyment and benefit of the local community. We welcome your views and feedback.

We also need more Members in order to have a louder voice when campaigning for more resources for the canals maintenance and restoration. Do you know of others who would be interested in joining us?

New members can sign up on our membership portal at <https://mbact.org.uk/support-us/#membership> and select the blue button "Join us/Renew". Alternatively scan this QR code which will take you to the membership part of our website.





Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust

BUSINESS MEMBERS

We are extremely grateful to all supporters of our Trust and especially those who provide financial or service support.

Our business supporters are:

BEACON PARK BOATS

Luxury canal holidays in the Brecon Beacons

Beacon Park Boats, Llangattock



Road House
Narrowboats,
Gilwern



Govilon Boat
Club



Cooper Marine, Herons
Rest Marina



Newport and Usk Vale Lions



Penelope's Café,
Goytre Wharf

The Lord Raglan Community Boat project also benefitted greatly with a considerable amount of support from local and international companies via donations of equipment and services. We are extremely grateful to all those companies and people who helped on this long project. You can see all of the companies and people who supported this community boat project on our website page for the boat at <https://mbact.org.uk/our-community-boat-project-the-lord-raglan/>

Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust (MBACT) Registered Charity No. 515879

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