



Bradley Canal Restoration Society

Annual General Meeting – 1st May 2024

Annual Trustees Report

General Update

We continue to make progress with our plans for restoration, which now include a regular dialogue with both the West Midlands Combined Authority and Wolverhampton City Council. Both organisations are critical to our plans as we move forward. To this end, several meetings and visits to the site have been held with Andy Street (the West Midlands Mayor) and his colleagues, which has resulted in the BCRS being named within his re-election manifesto and a commitment to support the funding of a much-needed Feasibility Study, which will provide us with the evidence and underpin the business case for restoration funding. Andy Street was joined on his most recent visit by Sir Michael Fabricant MP, (Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways), who was keen to discuss the impact of the restoration on the local community, including visitor economy, health benefits and the environment.

In addition, we now meet regularly with the Leader of Wolverhampton City Council, Cllr Stephen Simkins (a member of the Society), who has committed the City Council to assisting with the funding for the Feasibility Study and who is willing to allocate council resource to support our aims. Our relationship with Wolverhampton City Council is particularly important due to the location of the restoration scheme, and we now need to pursue similar relationships with both Sandwell and Walsall

Our relationship with Canal & River Trust is essential to our current and future success. Colleagues both locally at the CRT Bradley Workshop and regionally at the West Midlands area office are supporting us in a range of ways, including with the planning and delivery of the Bradley Canal Festival, support with the work parties by providing training for volunteers and raising awareness through their regular health walks, organised in partnership with the Bilston Urban Village Medical Centre. These walks are proving beneficial in several ways by promoting the health benefits of walking, improving mindfulness, and showcasing the recreational opportunities along the canal, thus reinforcing CRT's message that "Life is better by water".

We have held a number of meetings with local businesses and organisations, including Warburton's, which backs onto the canal at Moorcroft Wood to explore opportunities for grant funding and their corporate social responsibility agenda. The conversations are ongoing, as we look to develop this relationship to hopefully include a more formal working relationship and opportunities to contribute to our committee.

In addition, a relationship has been developed with Kennedys Law to support the update and further development of our policies and procedures, on a pro-bono basis and how they could support our future work through their corporate social responsibility activities.

Members will recall that at last year's AGM we were joined by Graham Whorton, who explained the significance of the Black Country GeoPark and the significance of the Bradley Canal within the Geopark. Following Graham's presentation, we were then invited to meet with UNESCO Assessors on their evaluation trip to gather evidence in support of the GeoPark's re-designation. This group of international visitors were genuinely interested in the historical significance of canals within the context of geological heritage and the development of the Black Country.

During the year we have also had the opportunity to present to other local organisations and canal societies. These have included Wolverhampton Archaeology group, who have committed to some investigative work at the site of the lock-keepers cottage, the Black Country Society, for whom we delivered one of the Summer Walks along the route of the restoration, and a presentation to the Worcester-Birmingham and Droitwich Canals Society. All of these events are an opportunity to share our plans with the wider community and generate interest in the restoration and hopefully add capacity to the Society.

During the year, our Chair, Dave Pearson took the decision to stand down for personal reasons and Rod Griffin, in his role as Vice-Chair, took the reins for the remainder of the year. Rod has indicated that he will not seek election as Chair for health reasons but will remain as a member of the Committee and will contribute to our ongoing work. The Committee wishes to place on record our sincere thanks to both Dave and Rod for their huge contributions. At the AGM, we will seek to elect a new Chair and Vice-Chair.

Work Parties

With 12-15 regular attendees, the year to date has seen considerable advances in clearing and maintaining the stretch of canal from Moorcroft Junction to the bottom lock and the area above, up to Bilston Road bridge, through our regular work parties on the third Saturday of each month.

Removing dead wood, overhanging branches, and clearing Himalayan Balsam and other low-level vegetation has enhanced the area. Careful placement of logs has created microenvironments for insects. The by-wash adjacent to lock number eight has been exposed above and below the lower end of the lock. The old arm below the flight has been identified and work has commenced on clearing the infill and vegetation. Additionally, work has been done to straighten steel rails atop the fencing along the towpath down to Moorcroft Junction, bent over the years by falling trees from the adjacent woods.

Litter picking continues as littering remains a challenging theme. Local residents and walkers remain interested and appreciative of our efforts to improve the environment.

We take this opportunity to record our thanks to both the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society and Canal & River Trust for their support and of course to all the volunteers who through their efforts have made such good progress.

Bradley Canal Festival

Our second Bradley Canal Festival, held in June, was again well attended, even though the weather wasn't quite as kind as the year before! The next festival will be held on the 15th June and is set to become a regular fixture on the local calendar.

The festival is a significant undertaking for us and needs considerable planning and organising on the day. However, the benefits are significant, both from an awareness raising perspective, and as a revenue stream. Whilst we aren't looking to make a large profit, we do need to cover costs and hopefully generate income from stall holders, raffles, donations, new members, etc.

Other canal festivals across the region benefit enormously from this level of profile and it would be valuable to the Society to organise an event each year in Bradley. We are indebted to our friends at the Birmingham Canal Navigation Society, IWA, and CRT, all of whom make a huge contribution to the day, from running the bar, delivering workshop tours, organising boat trips, and preparing the site in advance of the day.

To make this a successful day, we do need support from members and supporters. If you feel you can help, with the planning or on the actual day please contact us on info@bradleycanal.co.uk

Targets for 2024-25

- Explore with CRT engineers the possibility of clearing the infill within the pounds at locks 8 and 9.
- Engage with local business to raise the profile of the scheme and explore opportunities for funding and/or their corporate social responsibility agenda.
- Explore opportunities for additional fundraising by identifying suitable grant applications to undertake specific pieces of work.
- Commission a Feasibility Study to inform future business planning and funding applications.
- Further expand the expertise of the Executive Committee by recruiting additional committee members
- Pursue contacts with both Sandwell and Walsall Councils to further develop positive relationships and meaningful communication.
- Continue to organise the annual Bradley Canal Festival, with increased numbers of attendees.

The targets will be the focus for Executive Committee meetings during the year and progress will be reported back at the Annual General Meeting in 2025.



Bradley Canal Restoration Society

Financial Report 2023-24

This report reflects the financial position of the association from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

Gift Aid continues to be reflected in the accounts, and we would encourage members, who are UK taxpayers, to indicate as such when they renew.

A rule change, agreed at last year's AGM, brought all membership renewals in line with a consistent date (1st April) to make the renewals process simpler and to aid cashflow forecasting. As expected, this has resulted in reduced membership income as members who paid during the year would have their date deferred to the new April 1st date. We have now instigated the new membership period which should see membership income rise next year.

Statement of Accounts: 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024

	2023-24	2022-23
Income		
Subscriptions	£ 858.68	£ 1,792.14
Donations	£ 1,607.00	£ 2,238.00
Gift Aid	£ 33.17	£ 155.07
Amazon Smile	£ 54.69	£ 84.43
Bradley Canal Festival	£ 918.50	£ 165.00
Total	£ 3,472.04	£ 4,434.64
 Expenditure		
Equipment	£ 314.82	£ 256.03
Insurance	£ 389.76	£ 600.37
Administration	£ 2,077.58	£ 2,029.48
Subscriptions	£ 285.40	£ 249.00
Event Costs	£ 134.75	£ 99.15
Professional Services	N/A	£ 360.00
Accountancy Fees	£ 400.00	£ 400.00
Printing	£ 427.76	£ 278.33
Bradley Canal Festival	£ 499.28	
Total	£ 4,529.35	£ 4,272.36
 Balance	<u>£ -1,057.31</u>	<u>£ 162.28</u>

G Hawkins (Hon. Treasurer) – 5th April 2024