



Chelmer Canal Trust Newsletter

July 2023

Issue No 65



Welcome to our Chelmer Canal Trust Summer Newsletter!

In whatever way you relate to the Chelmer Canal Trust we hope you find something of interest within this Newsletter.

Looking back on things CCT has been involved in since the New Year, it's been a busy 6 months. In January it was the Annual Local Action Group Workshop in Shropshire. A couple of days learning how groups dealing with invasive weeds are getting on, and an opportunity to catch up with the movers and shakers in case there's something new we can learn about managing Pennywort. Then in February a fascinating talk by Vlogger Lorna Jane who talked to us about Vlogging and her experience of the Navigation. You can catch up with her Vlogs via links on our website. Just [click here](#).

We are a key player in the Essex and Suffolk Water Pennywort Networking Group which meets twice per year to coordinate efforts to control pennywort on the Navigation. Additionally, each year we take members of the group on a 'site visit' where they get to see first-hand the challenges and the successes of our CCT management of Pennywort. This year we took them to Rushes Lock in May.

We were asked to talk, in May, to the IWA Chelmsford Branch at one of their regular social meetings. It's always good to be able to clarify the difference between CCT and other organisations. Often we have similar objectives, and agree, but that doesn't mean that we go about things in the same way, not does it mean that we don't sometimes feel the need to criticise or disagree. Not sure what they were expecting, but they were polite and genuine in their thanks!

One of the things we are best known for is, of course, our CCT work parties. We are fortunate enough to have a band of loyal volunteers who pitch up to do practical work. And come back regularly for more, despite the fact that sometimes the conditions we work in are pretty challenging.

Our 'Pennywort' Work Parties continue each month. We've mentioned before that Pennywort is changing – adapting to the UK climate – by surviving winters, starting to root into the bank, and its annual growth spurt taking place later in the year each year. Nevertheless, we are on the case and take every opportunity to remove anything from a large raft to a small weedlet that might otherwise become a raft of Pennywort. And with work having recommenced on the C&B Navigation Lighter 'Susan'. Team Susan has made a number of visits to St Osyth to undertake the painting that is needed to ensure that Susan's woodwork (and she's nearly all wood!) is protected for a long time. We want her back on the Navigation! Check out our Work Party reports [here](#).

A lovely event at the end of June when a group of us met one evening beside the Navigation to remember Dudley Courtman and inaugurate the Bench in Dudley's memory. There's more about that later in this Newsletter including a poem about Dudley written by his twin brother Don.

Finally, for now, please ensure that you have the date of our 2023 AGM booked – Tuesday, 12th September. Of course, we'll be sending out the details in due course.

Neil
CCT Chair and CCT Trustee

Your Chelmer Canal Trust.

As a Trustee Board we are keen to know your views about how we are doing and where you think we should be going! After all, the Chelmer Canal Trust is YOUR organisation! So, please get in touch and tell us. We welcome comments whether they are positive or negative.

We'd also like your input into articles in the Newsletter. So, please consider putting pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, and send us an article we can use. It could be about the Navigation – maybe your personal reflections or a tale of your use of it – or about anything that could be of interest to CCT members. Maybe a favourite picture you've taken?

We are hoping to hear from you! Please email: neil@chelmercanaltrust.co.uk

.....

Trustee and Work Party member Steve reflects on his 'Red Kite' experience on the Navigation..

We set off on an early March Saturday morning weed busting session from Buster's mooring at Heybridge Basin to tackle the weed in the chunker at Maldon.

Soon after we left the moorings behind us I noticed three "Buzzards" flying low in the sky. On closer inspection it was pointed out to me that they were in fact Red Kites! In Essex, just outside Maldon! Yes, indeed! Who'd have thought? Well, blow me down, excited much!



How I missed the big forked tail I don't know? For me, bird watching, it's much better to spot something and get the identity wrong than to keep quiet.

For those not in the know, this is a big thing, huge, (well for me) as it's the first time I have spotted them on this side of the country. After talking to a couple of local bird watchers they have confirmed other sightings in the area.

The English population went extinct over a hundred years ago. Having been re-introduced, I've spent many hours watching them in Wales where efforts were made to increase the population some years back.

There have been many reintroductions in other parts of the country, with birds brought over from Europe. So, after years of persecution along with other birds of prey, it is good to see them over this part of the country. I hope you all catch a glimpse of these stunning rare birds.

I've found the real trick to spotting any bird of prey is, to look up if you hear gulls or other bird calling overhead, because sometimes you get lucky and spot one of our special birds of prey.

Steve

CCT Work Party member and CCT Trustee

(note from Editor – in the last Newsletter Steve described his dilemma about rebuilding or replacing his coracle. He's still on the case and we're hoping to hear more in the next Newsletter. In the meantime we happen to know that he's done some temporary repairs and he's still on the water in the Mark 1 version!)

More about 'Susan' from Chelmer Canal Trust, and Susan Trust, Trustee Duncan Lumley.

Over the Easter weekend the floating dry dock housing Susan unfortunately sank. Luckily Susan, which hadn't experienced being in water for many a long year, remained afloat. Pumps were used to deal with rainwater and the slight leakage expected having been out of the water for so long. The boatyard moved her onto their slipway and she remained in good shape.



As is mentioned elsewhere in this Newsletter, our volunteers have been able to work on her. Whilst this incident was unfortunate it has resulted in Susan exiting the dry dock and while in the water, allowing her planks to swell which would need to happen before her return to the Navigation anyway.

There's a further challenge. Susan's Stern Tube needs attention. It's a dilemma of knowing which approach is best. To try to refurbish the existing stern tube or to invest in a new one. With very limited funds to be able to do either it will need a creative approach to be able to fund that and to then enable Susan to be completed and returned to the Navigation.

Duncan

CCT's rep on The Susan Trust and CCT Trustee

A Walk In JA Baker Country. William Marriage

Great landscapes inspire great art. While the Stour Valley was fortunate to be made world famous by Constable and Gainsborough, the Chelmer Valley has JA Baker. His literary rendering of the Chelmer Valley of the 20th century is as vivid in prose as *The Leaping Horse* is in paint. The Chelmsford author's work of "wild writing" is the subject of study by top level students of English literature. Last September, a walk was organised to retrace some of his steps, and allow walkers to appreciate that which had inspired him. This was a circular walk from the Little Baddow History Centre, supported by the Chelmer Valley Landscape Group. Joining a well curated walk like this is a shortcut to discovering some special places that might otherwise take years to stumble across.



Taking in first Little Baddow Church, then the fields behind, leading down to The River via attractive wetlands on the valley floor. We reached a short section of towpath. Here the walk seemed to briefly kiss the river just where the Sandon Brook flows in below Little Baddow Mill road bridge. It was as if to acknowledge that this ribbon of water had carved the whole valley landscape over the millennia, but that it was not the whole story. We headed inland again to explore more of JA Baker's presumed favourite spots. Presumed, because nowhere in his writing does Baker refer to any specific locations, but we do know that he spent much time in the Chelmer valley in his pursuit of the peregrines, describing the landscape so vividly that the valley is unmistakable.



There are many mentions of "the ford" in his Book "The Peregrine", where he would wait for the bird of prey to come to bathe, as they must each day. While there is more than one ford in the valley, the ford on our walk was the attractive spot where the Sandon Brook briefly flows along Hurrells Lane, or is it more that Hurrells Lane forms the bed of the brook here? Either way, drivers may briefly imagine their car to be a boat! Here we paused to hear readings from Baker's work while able to admire views which had inspired his words, including the "pylons silver-webbed like swords" marching across the valley. The man was clearly a genius. Obliging overhead some crows were mobbing a red kite as if to enact scenes from the book, with the red kite as the understudy for the main character.

We moved on via Waterhall Meadow, and a narrow path through a jungle like field of maize before finally arriving at the celebrated Graces Walk. This appeared to us firstly as a spectacular line of trees on the skyline, opening up into the vista of the avenue sweeping down to the reputedly haunted bridge over Sandon brook. (Dudley's article in issue 39 of this newsletter tells the story of the haunting far better than I could, so look up that article if you want to know more. ([click here](#)) We walked to the very end of Graces walk, to the house "Great Graces" the once home of Sir Henry Mildmay, and from there a short walk along the country lanes, with glimpses of views over the valley to distant Chelmsford, until finally we reached the History Centre again, and the end of the walk. I have to confess that this walk was a bit of a revelation to me.



With our focus on the Chelmer and Blackwater as a waterway, it is all too easy to be drawn to the towpath when it comes to walking. While this is no bad thing, this walk showed that there are some spectacular paths nearby which are not to be missed. JA Baker's writing shows what inspiration may be found in the landscape and nature. So what are you waiting for? Go out and be inspired.

William

CCT Work Party member and CCT Trustee

Dudley Courtman 1934 – 2018.

Many of us new Dudley Courtman. A person passionate about the Navigation and passionate about ensuring that it was used. Well into the latter years of his life Dudley was to be seen out on the water in his pink kayak.



When he died in 2018 we wanted to commemorate him in some way and launched an online appeal to fund a bench to preserve his memory. Dudley was unique. By no means 'run of the mill', a lover of the Navigation and the Chelmer Valley. We wanted a bench in an appropriate location to reflect just that.

We raised the funds through an online Appeal but Covid got in the way, as did post-Covid commerce issues, and then the winter. So it was only in this year that we had been able to instal that bench. Our thanks go to all those who contributed to the online appeal, to the teams of volunteers who created the base and then secured the bench securely to the base. And to Mike Bloomfield who helped us with tools and materials. A tribute to someone with whom so many of us here have an affinity – the love of the Navigation.

Thursday, June 29th was the date of the 'inauguration'. The official 'installation' of the bench. A further tribute to Dudley was the number of people who wanted to be there. Some made their own way up the

towpath from Hoe Mill Lock to get to the location of the bench, others travelled up by boat. All wanted to be part of the collective memory of Dudley.

We were honoured by our President, Lord Petre, being prepared to be there. Lord Petre's reflections of knowing Dudley were followed by those of William Marriage who spent a lot of time with Dudley on the CCT Committee. Then from Jackie Carr who was introduced to canoeing by Dudley as a young person, had subsequently canoed all over the world and had come full circle in recently returning to canoe on the Navigation. A poem written by Dudley's twin brother Don was read by his nephew Philip (see below) before Dudley's daughter Rebecca talked about her father's love of the Navigation.



We all remembered Dudley, and we were as one as we toasted Dudley's memory: "Dudley Courtman – A Friend of the Navigation."



Intentionally the bench is no small two seater bench looking straight across the river! It's a four-person bench looking down one of the remote stretches of the Navigation. We imagine all sorts of people sitting on it – from those on their own on a walk to enjoy the solitude, through to groups of young people on their Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions. Some sitting on it, some dumping their rucksacks on it. Not looking across the river but looking down, enjoying the vista, seeing the curve of willows following the river's course, in the winter Ulting Church visible through the bare trees. Enjoying just being here.

Neil

CCT Chair, Work Party Organiser and CCT Trustee

Dudley.

By Dudley's twin brother Don Courtman

Every day without fail
Dudley came to preserve, protect and promote
His precious waterway.
He was there yesterday and again today
He never failed to be afloat,
Paddling, probing,
At home between its banks.
He kept his precious canoe
Always strapped to the roof of his car.
No one knows how he retrieved it
When it took off halfway up the M1 motorway,
Landing in the middle of the central reservation.
No one dare ask,
It was simply just part of his mission,
His fundamental belief,
What he did.

Dudley was never more content
Than to find himself on the river
Losing himself along its straights and bends,
Among its long bending reeds and trees.
Since he left, the river seems much quieter now
But still whispering under its breath,
Still sending its rippling call:
Dudley, Dudley, Dudley.
We can't believe you are not floating quietly here.
This is the inspiration that helped us all,
To be caressed by the river's gentle call.

Reading this Newsletter but not a member of the Chelmer Canal Trust?

If this Newsletter has helped you to learn more about the Trust, and about some of the things in which we are involved, and you are not yet a member, we'd love to welcome you. You can join online or by post. [Click here to get started.](#)

Interested in joining one of our Work Parties?

Contact Work Party organiser Neil: neil@chelmercanaltrust.co.uk



Want to contact us or keep in touch with us?

Follow us on Facebook: @ChelmerCanalTrust

Contact us

By Snailmail: c/o Windmill Pasture, Little Waltham Road, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 7TG.

By Email: enquiries@chelmercanaltrust.co.uk