



Chelmer Canal Trust Newsletter

December 2023



Issue No 66

Welcome to our Chelmer Canal Trust 'Winter Special' Newsletter!

For this Winter edition of our CCT Newsletter we've put together a bumper bundle of articles from a broader range of contributors than we've had before. Our thanks go to those who have put time aside to write and send in relevant and interesting articles that we anticipate many reading this Newsletter will appreciate. Settle down with a mug, or tumbler, of a drink of your choice and enjoy reading what follows.

It's been another busy year for the Chelmer Canal Trust. We've had talks at Moulsham Mill - also attended by some online - on a range of interesting topics from 'Vlogging' to the recently-launched 'Chelmer Valley Landscape Group'. If you missed the talks, or want to experience them again, we have our own CCT 'catch-up' service! Take a look at videos of the talks via our Chelmer Canal Trust website.

Our regular monthly Work Parties have continued the battle against the dastardly Floating American Pennywort. No mean feat as we continue to manage this invasive species which, having originated in South America, has now started to mutate to survive even better in the UK, over-wintering ever more successfully and with 'floating' now being replaced in some places by 'rooted in stream beds and on banks'. Our Work Parties have also taken on additional, necessary, work including the cleaning and tidying-up of Richard Coates's tomb, installing and commemorating a bench in memory of Dudley Courtman and putting in and replacing booms to stop Pennywort entering the main system from side-streams. We've made even more progress painting the lighter 'Susan', hoping to speed up her return to the Navigation where she was originally used commercially. Check the Work Party reports on our website.

During the year, to ensure the safety of our brilliant Work Party volunteers, we've bought a new set of buoyancy aids and acquired more tools to make our tasks more effective, especially when we have several Work Parties on the same day in different locations.

Our grateful thanks go to all volunteers, both those participating in our organised monthly and occasional weekday Work Parties and those who go out on their own, who have worked hard to help us to achieve our aims. Sometimes in cold and wet weather, sometimes in sweatingly-hot weather and, in the case of work on Susan, working in not just the hot sun but also the heady fumes of black tar varnish.

Of course, we also extend our thanks to everyone who supports the Chelmer canal Trust – we would not exist without you!

Your committee has met regularly throughout the year to manage the affairs of the Trust. To ensure that we know more about our members, we are just finalising a Member Survey. It will be coming out soon and we ask you to respond. If we know who you are, and what your interest in CCT is, we can ensure that the Chelmer Canal Trust remains current and is the sort of organisation that you want it to be.

Before you read on, just one last thing. Please give us feedback on this Newsletter. And if you've got something relevant that it would be good for others to know about, please consider writing an article for the Summer edition.

Neil
CCT Chair and CCT Trustee

Chas talks about the Feeder Ditch Notice Board

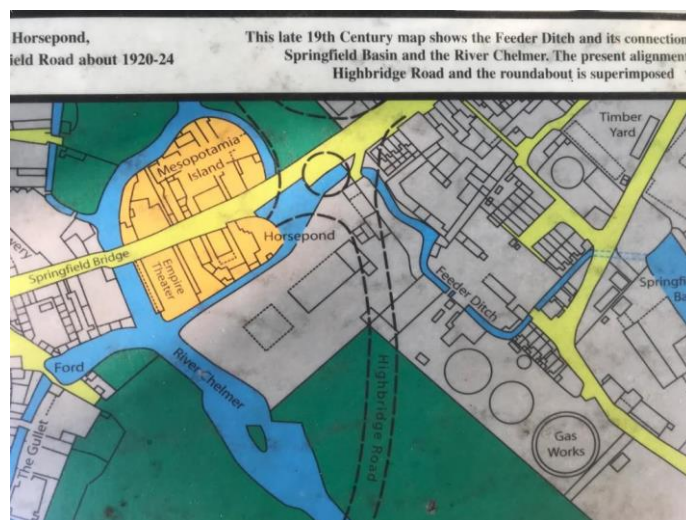
Behind the Iceland frozen food shop in Springfield Rd, Chelmsford and next to the council multistorey car park, there is a 'Feeder Ditch'. The purpose of this is to feed Springfield Basin with water from the River Chelmer in order to keep the water level topped up for the boats visiting and moored there. The water is fed to the ditch via a pipe from the Chelmer. This pipe leaves the Chelmer opposite The Meadows Shopping Centre and flows under the car park and flyover to the open ditch. Its water can be seen flowing in the ditch beside the multi storey car park. It then goes into another pipe diagonally under Wharf Rd to flow into Springfield Basin and keep the water in the Basin topped up.

At the top end of the feeder ditch there is a CCT notice board containing information about the Navigation and its Feeder Ditch. About 2 years ago it was mentioned that the board was only irregularly cleaned and was dirty, hard to read and looked a bit uncared for. The nearby overhanging vegetation didn't help of course. A bit of regular TLC was required and seeing as I lived in Chelmsford, I was asked if it would be possible for me to take care of the situation.

I agreed to undertake this task, but was a bit worried about damaging the board. What could I use to clean it? How sturdy was it? I was assured that it was quite robust, a bit of washing up liquid and scrubbing would not harm it. On my first visit, this proved to be so and without further ado I set to clean and wipe the board clean.



I usually top up my freezer about once a month (on a Tuesday of course to get my OAP 10% discount!), so just before my shopping I spend a few minutes cleaning the board for all to see. I found the content to be quite interesting, especially the map showing the current roads on top of the original area and showing Mesopotamia Island and the original course of the Feeder Ditch!



Next time you are in the area, please do call in and take a look.

Chas

CCT Work Party Volunteer

Thanks Chas - your efforts are appreciated!

And while we are in the Springfield Basin area, here's an update on the Chelmer Waterside Access Bridge.

Site compounds have been established on each side of the river and Tree Surgeons are now removing trees for the new bridge. Work is also being done on the approach ramps to the Bailey Bridge which is, over the next few months being dismantled and lifted from its current position and transported to the new location for storage and further use.



Update for the current programme is phase 2 Piling works for the new structure between January and April 2024.

Phase 3 is the Approach Ramp construction which will take place between March and July 2024

Phase 4 is the start of the installation of the new bridge taking place from August to September 2024 This will be followed by a further 4 phases and details will be known later.

There are further details in an informatic video that can be accessed by [clicking here](#).

***Duncan
CCT Trustee***

The joys of having a CCT website! (NOT!)

We are very pleased that our Chelmer Canal Trust Website is such a valuable resource to our members. It contains loads of useful information from dates of all of our events, including Work Parties and Talks, to reports of those events and videos of our talks, our history and much more.

However, one downside of having a website on which we publish contact details is the ability for our contact details to be 'harvested'. A growing theme this year – and many of us are probably experiencing the same through our personal emails – are the emails promoting services that we have absolutely no interest in or use for. With no filtering of whether or not it's appropriate for a small, volunteer led and run, charity, with no employees, we've in the past few weeks had offers to help us get Research and Development Tax Credits, have our office rubbish taken away, have our utility bills reduced, buy Christmas Hampers to send to our chosen customers (sorry, don't hold your breath). Most recently a company has made a pitch to instal a Drinks Station.



Now, many of us would appreciate a Drinks Station on each of the workboats and on the banks where we stop for refreshments and the one in the picture must be made for us as it has pennywort draped over it already! However, sorry to disappoint Work Party volunteers, we aren't rushing to order!

Finally, for the F1 Grand Prix at Silverstone in July 2024 we can have 8 tickets for 3-day passes for the F1 Paddock Club, typically priced at £3,000 per person, but we can have them for £1,496 per person, plus VAT. Let us know if you are interested and we'll forward the details!

Some years ago CCT tried to initiate a Local Action Group – a group combining local agencies with an interest in managing Pennywort. We failed because we couldn't secure the support of other organisations. However, not all was lost and in the past five years there have been developments. Ashley Pinnock of Essex and Suffolk Water, and Chair of a networking group, has sent us this:

“December last year marked the first milestone ‘a 5-year anniversary’ since our Networking Group was formed in 2017 ‘The Langford Floating Pennywort Group’ consisting of several organisations who teamed up with one goal in mind – to control and eradicate Floating American Pennywort from the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation area between Chelmsford and Heybridge Basin with a particular focus on improving biodiversity and navigation, for wildlife and watercraft users within the river system. The group is represented by individuals from following organisations:

Essex & Suffolk Water- Conservation Team & Catchment Team

Environment Agency – Fisheries & Biodiversity Team

Chelmer Canal Trust – Registered charity that organises monthly volunteer work parties to help maintain the River Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation

Native Landscapes – Specialist INNS Control/Management Contractor

Essex Wildlife Trust – Wilder Rivers & Protected Species Team

Essex Waterways – Manager of River Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation

Ilford & District Piscatorial Society – Angling Club

The group works collaboratively, with meetings held twice per year to agree and coordinate an annual work programme with a targeted approach to tackling the worst affected areas first. We share our success with others trying to achieve the same and set up and coordinate other similar groups within the UK to help tackle this increasing problem including the Animal and Plant Health Agency and with other water companies with the aim to further strengthen existing partnerships and generate new partnerships by working together towards a common goal.

The group's principle aims are to ultimately reduce the spread of American Floating Pennywort in the main river and to help maintain safe access and passage through the Navigation for boats and other watercraft, along with improving habitats to support wider biodiversity. The group, as a networking group with the same aims, has now become a Local Action Group, a LAG.



The group is well on its way to achieving its aims and has already during the 5 years we have been working together seen a significant reduction in the amount of American Floating Pennywort present. The

group builds on 20+ years of existing Floating Pennywort control work being done in the area by the Chelmer Canal Trust. Without the consistent approach and hard work the Chelmer Canal Trust has delivered over this long period of time into controlling this troublesome Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) then we wouldn't be where we are today. Their knowledge and experience in dealing with Floating American Pennywort, and the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation itself, is invaluable to the wider group and is very much relied upon.

On behalf of the Langford Floating Pennywort Group, I would like to thank the Chelmer Canal Trust and its volunteers for all the hard work they have done over the years to help form the foundations for what our group has become today."

Ashley Pinnock

Conservation Advisor at Essex & Suffolk Water and Chair of Langford Floating Pennywort Group (LAG)

Thanks, Ashley, CCT appreciates your comments!

Volunteers Pam and Mike Robards describe their contribution to weedbusting as a personal challenge.

Many years ago our dear friend Dudley Courtman encouraged me and a friend when regularly paddling kayaks on the Chelmer Navigation to pick out the Pennywort weed as we passed by to help keep the river clear.

Move on a good few years, and after joining the Trust, my wife Pam & I began our now weekly paddles between Hoe Mill and Papermill and it seemed like a good idea to spend some of that time weeding too. So, this has become a frequent task for us especially when the growth is strong in the summer. At other times we do litter picking instead, or simply enjoy a straight paddle on the route. Of course, normal paddling is more enjoyable and does become a significant challenge when the river is in spate. Mornings with ice on the river are also fun as long as we can actually break through it.



Having been on CCT Work Parties using our open canoe, we found that we could get to places that the larger boats could not. Taking out long strands of Pennywort is very satisfying and quite easy. Large rafts are a different matter and probably best left to work boats as the water held by the leaves quickly spreads across the bottom of our canoe. When the weed is intertwined with reeds and worse still brambles we often regret the task.

We generally travel on the right of the river so as to cover both banks in a return trip. With heavy infestation it is slow going and we will both pull out weed at the same time, and yes, the canoe does lean over alarmingly at times. We have made up some small rakes to help with the reach especially under the brambles. On these days we kneel in the boat to get a better reach and to help stabilise it, but we do need our full whitewater trousers to save us from the water sloshing around in the bottom. However, when we are on top of the problem we paddle at a good speed fairly close to the bank. Pam is the spotter at the front and, with luck, she can call out some weed and I can drop the paddle into the boat and make a grab as we go by. This is truly satisfying as it works well when there is a single strand.

You may understand that to stop and reverse takes quite a bit of effort, and more so the faster you go. So, our Thursday morning paddle can range from just 2 hours (with tea break at Papermill) to a good 3½ hours. The weed is left to dry and die on the river bank, but it is alarming to see that it can still thrive there when the weather is damp.

We do have a small patch above Ulting church where it seems to have rooted into the silt at the river's edge. Pulling it out doesn't appear to do the job there, but we persevere. On odd days we have picked a boat full, but now it is generally single stalks as we have managed to clear most of the length, which may fill a couple of buckets. We do worry when we hear of weed cutting up river though because no matter how careful the machine is operated some stalks are bound to escape and flow down to this stretch.

After a problem with my shoulder this summer we had to stop for 6 weeks. When we started again in August it was truly gratifying to find just 2 small clumps of weed on our first return trip. Together with litter picking we both gain real satisfaction from keeping our river clear.

Mike Robards
CCT Volunteer

Thanks to Mike and Pam for their sterling efforts.

Ahead of the game - by about 20 years!

There are many of us who can remember, on early Work Parties, pulling out huge rafts of pennywort, not just a few times over a year, but every damned work party. And for three full hours of every work party. That was back in time! About 20 years ago. Here we are (right) in 2004.

In those days it was simple and straightforward. Dudley contacted us and we pitched up every month and hauled out huge amounts of Pennywort from the Navigation. We got a bit of publicity in the local press but essentially we just got on with it.



Memories of those days have been rekindled recently when, at last, the problems of Floating American Pennywort elsewhere have received national interest. Both Angling and Canoeing groups have been involved in high-profile, nationally-reported, Pennywort Removal initiatives.

Here's one on the Lea and Stort in Enfield. Good luck to them. They are putting a lot of effort in (although they seem to be leaving it to one person!)

Let's hope they learn quickly all we did about the broken-off stems and small strands also needing to be caught and removed to prevent worse problems next year!

Neil
CCT Chair, Work Party Organiser and CCT Trustee

Also 20 years ago, and again this year – Richard Coates’s Grave!

Richard Coates means a lot to us at the Chelmer Canal Trust! Although designed by John Rennie, most of the work creating the Navigation was organised and overseen by Richard Coates. If it wasn’t for Richard Coates we probably wouldn’t know each other! He’s buried in an impressive, fenced, tomb in the graveyard of All Saints Church, Springfield. Look back through our work party reports and you will find a picture of the work that CCT volunteers did on the grave when a work party first went there in 2003.



On the left, the state they found it in in 2003. On the right the state we found it in in twenty years later in 2023



It wasn’t great when we went there in January. In fact, it took a fair while to confirm that it was Richard Coates’s grave. We needed two sessions there, involving three volunteers, to get the job done.

The first task was to cut down sufficient vegetation to actually get to the tomb (which required a willing soul - a live soul! - to squeeze between the railings and work on the thick ivy that covered the tomb itself.) All of the surrounding vegetation was cut back so that the tomb could actually be seen. On a second visit the church people had taken down the ‘eco cross’ and we were able to re-paint the railings in black with the finials picked out in the original gold. We won’t forget you, Richard!



Thanks to Keith, Chas and Neil for undertaking this work.

A brief report by Duncan on the latest on the lighter Susan.

The Susan Trust has been very grateful for the support given by the Chelmer Canal Trust in working towards getting the boat back in action. It was hoped to have Susan back at Sandford Mill by the end of 2023, but this now not going to happen due to the repair work still required.



With the original (or was it?) Stern Tube having been found to have dodgy bearings and the Tube needing replacing, funding for a replacement Tube to be purchased, and for it to be fitted by someone with the technical skills, took time. However, the good news is that a skilled engineer is now on the case! The work involves a long piece of timber called ‘the deadwood’ having a very long hole drilled through it to then be bored out to take the new Stern Tube. The picture shows the engineer’s drill that will be used to drill the pilot hole. Getting the angle right is crucial!

Chelmsford City Council, owners of the land where Susan was traditionally moored before she went off to St Osyth, has now told The Susan Trust that they will no longer be able to bring the vessel back to a berth at Sandford Mill. The Trustees are now in discussion to resolve this issue. A number of plans are being considered, one of which is that when the boat is brought back into the area it could be stationed at Heybridge Basin.

Duncan

CCT Trustee and CCT's rep on The Susan Trust

Editor's update! Exciting last-minute news! The pilot hole for the stern tube has now been drilled – and the hole is at the correct angle! A recent visit to the Sandford Mill Museum has allowed further measurements of the engine to be taken in order to confirm that the engine bearers are fitted appropriately.

To take a look at the same model of engine running after a major overhaul [click here](#).



Protecting and managing the natural habitat.

Over many years we've been sensitive to the value of the landscape of the Chelmer Valley. Some years ago we – CCT - organised a seminar at the Essex Record Office where a number of keynote speakers talked about the value of the natural landscape and the range of habitats within it. One main outcome was to be the publication by Essex Waterways Ltd. of a Vegetation Management Plan. CCT was to be fully involved in the Plan's development. Several years went by, we asked about progress from time to time and, hey ho, one day, a Vegetation Management Plan was published. And we hadn't been consulted at all!

So we've continued to take a close interest in the way natural habitats are managed by EWL, feeling that in some cases natural vegetation that offers habitats to a host of species, and which plays a key role in the beauty of the Valley, is 'over managed'. A short while ago Essex Waterways posted this pic on their Facebook page, congratulating their volunteers on such a fine job of clearing the bankside vegetation along the Long Pond:



It felt that it merited an enquiry to EWL! Was this work really necessary? Did it leave an area vulnerable to erosion? What would grow back there next year? Had valuable species had their habitats destroyed?

We are grateful to Dave Smart, EWL's General Manager, both for his reply to our enquiry, and for his permission to publish it:

"Further to the works we have recently carried out at Heybridge and to which you refer, the vegetation clearance at this particular location was in part driven by the fact that the area beneath the very dense canopy here was being regularly used by the local drug taking community. This was evidenced by the large amount of drug paraphernalia that we removed from the area. We should probably have referenced this in the FaceBook post.

From an ecological perspective and in terms of habitat, yes, the over-mature scrub does have a value but in my opinion this is limited. Much better to reduce this back during dormancy at this time of year and allow for natural succession to start again to create that pioneer scrub that we know is a more valuable and diverse wildlife habitat. One thing is certain, we can't just leave vegetation on the Navigation to its own devices without any management as natural succession will soon reduce it to become a dark, overgrown corridor, unfishable, unnavigable, inaccessible and lacking habitat diversity and species richness

The area cut back here actually accounts for a very small percentage of the overall vegetation-cover along the Navigation. In effect this is rotational management, cutting back a section each winter, which in practice provides vegetation and scrub of uneven age along the length of the Navigation which in turn provides for the maximum number of available ecological niches. Where any native deciduous scrub or trees are coppiced or cut back, the root systems remain alive and intact and can act as a fish refuge, if they protrude into the water column. Associated bare ground on the bank can offer valuable bankside habitat for a variety of bee, wasp and other invertebrate species. As the vegetation re-grows, as you rightly point out that it will, not only the new tree growth, but additional bramble and other shrubby vegetation form the 'pioneer scrub' referred to above which as I've already stated, is recognised as a very valuable habitat for a wide variety of invertebrates and a number of nesting bird species. You mention nettles coming back. If they do appear, nettles are native, and do grow on the fertile banks of the Navigation, but in the sunshine are a fantastic habitat for many invertebrates to complete their life cycles, as I'm sure you're well aware. If not I have a book entitled 'Nettles and Invertebrates' which I will happily lend you 😊.

Just before signing off, you also mention erosion risk. Given that this is on the Long Pond, I don't really think that this is creating any significant erosion risk, as you know the levels and flow here are a completely different animal to the Navigation above Beeleigh, being much more of a constant throughout the year."

Thanks, Dave, for this welcome and informative response.

Here's more about wildlife around the Navigation and the Chelmer Valley via one of our Work Party volunteers.

Having lived in the Springfield area for most of his life, Keith knows the Chelmer Valley well. Several times each week he walks in the Chelmer Valley and along the Navigation. Making him a valuable reporter of the Pennywort situation. However, Keith does more than spot Pennywort. Knowledgeable about so much

of the wildlife we asked him to give some feedback on what he sees and hears. He sent in a list of SEVENTY FOUR different bird species he's seen throughout the year (including Peregrine Falcons which are especially relevant to the Chelmer Valley). Who'd have thought that there were so many different birds in the Chelmer Valley?! We'll find a way of showing Keith's interesting annual observations. In the meantime, here's a list of the birds Keith spotted in just one recent two-and-a-half hour walk from Chancellor Park, under the A12, along to Little Baddow Mill and back along the Navigation tow path to Barnes Mill and back up through Chelmer village.

Mallard
Red legged partridge
Kingfisher
Buzzard
Carrion Crow
Magpie
Moorhen
Mute Swan
Little Grebe
Greater Spotted Woodpecker
Blackbird
Robin



Above: a Dunnock

Below: a Kestrel. Guess where!



Wren
Dunnock
Starling
Black headed Gull
Heron
Song Thrush
Field Fare
Cormorant
Long Tailed Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit

Do you spot this many when you are out and about?

Thanks for this, Keith, and for the Pennywort feedback you provide.

In our last CCT Newsletter we promised an update on the progress (or otherwise) of Coracle-man Steve's less-than-trusty coracle. Here's what Steve reports:

Plan A. Repair, well let's try a quick fix. Various bits of wood nailed into place with the cover, one hour later job done. What could possibly go wrong? All good, then a trip to Coalbrookdale for the Iron bridge Coracle Regatta. After a rather frantic game of coracle water polo I discovered bits of frame floating in the bottom around my ankles. (Which is possibly not a good sign!)

So back home, more wood nailed in place, holes fixed, declared fit for purpose. One Work Party later, the whole bottom is now flexing. I think it is just the fabric holding it together!

Back at Ironbridge the expert race was won in a fibreglass Towy coracle, with me coming 3rd instead of the usual 2nd. The owner very kindly let me have a go. Really impressed at how fast and stable it felt.

For those not 'in the know' the Towy is a river in Wales that still has traditional net fishing rights and has its own type of coracle. The local net fishermen now use fibreglass coracles, but still in the traditional shape. A shape I tried out about 10 years ago.



Plan B. With the die now firmly set, I contacted Dave at Arrowcraft Composite Engineering Ltd. And here's the latest news: a Towy coracle is being made for me as I write this. So, I'm looking forward to using a more robust water-tight craft. If anyone fancies a go after a Work Party please let me know as I'm always keen to show off these traditional craft.

Steve

CCT Work Party member and CCT Trustee

Thanks for this update, Steve. You and your coracle are always a valuable part of our CCT Weedbusting Work Parties (and the coracle is great fun to have a go in!)

Thanks to Essex and Suffolk Water for the funding!

Through their parent company, Northumbrian Water, funding is available, through the Branch Out funding scheme, for groups like Chelmer Canal Trust for work that improves water quality and prevents the spread of invasive species. Here's news on two recent successful applications.

Boom!

Having spent lots of time pulling Pennywort out of the Navigation itself we don't want it to be reinfected. Pennywort growing in feeder streams and ditches is one source of reinfection. In some places the natural growth of reeds in streams and ditches is enough to hold Pennywort back. But in some locations, including when stream and ditches have been cleared it is easy for Pennywort to be flushed into the main system. This is where floating booms play a part by holding the weed back. We've tried them out in several locations and they work. However, they don't last for ever and they don't take well to having heavy objects thrown onto them. The recent BranchOut funding we received allowed us to buy 24m of floating boom and it didn't take us long to get out there and put it to good use. Here's the new boom at Stonhams weir pool.



Tools!

Over the years we've tried to ensure that our volunteers are able to access equipment that works efficiently in removing Pennywort. We've used cromes to remove large rafts of Pennywort ever since we started. (we are not exactly sure who 'donated' them). However, they are heavy, have limited reach, and aren't suitable for individual strands of pennywort. Over the past few years extending poles up to 2.4m long (or 7' 10" in old money) with a grubber or rake attachment on the end have been really successful and much-loved by our volunteers. But if we were sharing our original red poles out amongst three work parties working in different locations on the same day there just weren't enough. Another Branch Out application. Repeated success. And more red poles and grubber attachments. The picture, left, shows our new red poles with the new attachments clipped onto them.



William ponders on Heritage and Landscapes

It is possible that the stream fed by water flowing out of a culvert beneath the Army and Navy roundabout and winding across the Baddow Meads, is the original course of the River Chelmer. Or perhaps the Can. Like a natural river, it seems to run along the lowest part of the valley, while the modern Chelmer almost seems to shun the northern edge of the flood plain here. The times when the main river would have run free, carving out the valley are lost in the deep past, long before accurate mapping and detailed land surveys existed, so this is all conjecture. We do know that in the days before the industrial revolution, the river was an important source of power for the mills of the time. Diverting the stream to the side of the valley, in the mostly flat lands of Essex, would have allowed higher weirs to be created to better turn the millers' water wheels. Centuries later, this modified river, was ideal for conversion into the navigable waterway we know and treasure today, while the original river is all but forgotten.

Many changes happen in the Chelmer Valley. This is how it has always been. Some changes charm us and ensure that each visit is somehow new and fresh. The turn of the seasons; the changing metrological moods; the constantly changing flora and fauna of the valley. But we worry about other changes which may detract from our enjoyment. Mineral extraction works; the encroachment of urban sprawl threatening to erase the heritage of tranquillity for ever.

The famous artist John Constable captured the beauty of the Stour Valley with such mastery that the landscape has taken his name for its own, and obtained the vigorous protection that famous beauty confers. With this in mind, The Chelmer Vally Landscape Group was recently launched. The group seeks to protect the landscape which filled the pages of Author J.A. Baker's notebooks over many years. The notes and observations which he condensed into his bestselling book "The Peregrine". The 50th anniversary of its original publication was too good an opportunity to pass up. The Group's Chairman Nigel Brown gave our November talk about this new group, and some interesting details of the archaeology of the Valley, hiding in plain sight. (if you missed it, there is a recording in the library on our website). Not to be missed! The Chelmer Canal Trust is represented on the Landscape group. The group brings together the organisations who, like us, have a passion for the valley. A key goal is to obtain a formal designation for this special landscape. A landscape which has been shaped by old industry, nature and agriculture somehow managing to rub along.

What is it that makes an old thing worthy of our affections and preservation as a piece of heritage? Often objects built for rude functionality are now preserved and defended with a passion which would no doubt have baffled their original constructors. The locks on the Navigation are but one example. Similarly, who would have guessed when the authorities in Chelmsford, as a cost saving measure in post-war austerity, deployed a surplus military Bailey Bridge, that its eventual replacement with a modern bridge would trigger so much angst and demands that it be preserved and re-used? Simple well-designed practicality has a subtle elegant beauty which the designer may never have consciously intended. Maybe in this case it's got something to do with the way the boards of the deck would pleasingly rattle with each wheel which passed over them. Let's hope the contractors who removed it took good care. There are already proposals for where it can go next.

There are promises that the old gasometer frames will also return one day, tastefully restored, to grace the city skyline. From the Navigation's point of view, there is irony here. The gasworks site was intimately linked to Springfield Basin and the supply of newly cheap coal from the lighters on the Navigation. Making town gas from coal was a dirty business, and for most of its history the gasworks was a deeply unattractive sight. Maybe the proximity allowed Springfield Basin to be surrounded by impenetrable fences for so many years.



Now, more and more waterfront is being opened to public access with modern waterfront developments. Chelmsford has started valuing, rather than hiding, the waterfronts relatively recently. And this is welcome. Nobody wants to endure their home being flooded, and Chelmsford used to suffer from frequent inundations, even flooding the lower end of the High Street, an event thankfully unknown in recent years. The cost of this protection though, was a complete reworking of all the rivers in the town, with many riparian features, including the ford (aka Horsepond) - which provided the very name of the town - being lost.



We can be glad that the two historic bridges over the River Can were retained, although now they must be viewed between high walls of dry mid 20th century concrete brutalism. These walls may have held back the floods for now, but science tells us that the flooding issue will increase. More modern urban design thinking allows us to enjoy the benefits of being waterside, while hopefully keeping safe from increasing flood events.

One of the most changed locations on the Navigation has to be Paper Mill Lock. It has always been something of a favourite location. Many will remember the time when there was very little there other than the beauty of the river, a few boats, and the occasional trip on Victoria. People often complained that you couldn't get a cup of tea! We organised a boating festival there to raise the public profile. By some estimates, we attracted a thousand visitors that day. We were delighted, although nowadays that would be a typical summer weekend's footfall. Even though the busy weekends give Paper Mill a slightly brash edge, it still somehow retains the essence of what makes it special, and this, like every other heritage feature of the valley, needs nurturing. After all, our heritage needs to have ongoing value. to have enough people who care, to have enough money and time spent on it, to keep it going, and to keep it more valuable than that which always waits to replace it.

William
CCT Company Secretary and CCT Trustee

William is the Chelmer Canal Trust's representative on the Chelmer Valley Landscape Group.

Are you 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.](#)

Are you reading this Newsletter in hard copy rather than electronically?

Please let us know if you could receive our Newsletters via email rather than snailmail. We are happy to keep printing and posting your copy, but it is considerably more expensive to do so than emailing it to you, especially as the Editor seems to want to include lots of pictures

Would you like more information about helping by becoming a Chelmer Canal Trust Committee Member?

We are always on the lookout for more people to help on the committee. If you think that might be something you could be involved in please email neil@chelmercanaltrust.co.uk

Are you interested in joining one of our Work Parties?

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

Would you be willing to write something for the Summer Newsletter?

We want to make our Newsletters as interesting and relevant as possible. If you have an idea for an article please get in touch. Contact the Editor: neil@chelmercanaltrust.co.uk

Do you want to contact us or keep in touch with us?

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Contact us

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By Email: enquiries@chelmercanaltrust.co.uk



Calm waters at Heybridge Basin as a yacht is craned out