



Chelmer Canal Trust Newsletter

July 2024

Issue No 67



It's a great privilege to be able to send our Chelmer Canal Trust Summer 2024 Newsletter to you!

We've put together a real smorgasbord of items that we hope will ensure that whatever your interest in the Chelmer Canal Trust, the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation or the Chelmer Valley, you will find something of specific interest to you.

There's no particular logic or theme to the order in which we've included articles. Think of them as your favourite Playlist set to 'Shuffle'!

If (well I hope I mean 'when') you read far enough you will find a report on the Member Survey that we carried out earlier in the year. We are so grateful to those members who gave us such valuable feedback. The responses were in the main supportive and positive and the feedback from part of the survey authorised the Board to make CCT's position publicly known – that we value the Navigation and the Chelmer Valley and must stand up for them both when they are threatened.

What else have we included in the Menu?

Well, there's an interesting article about one of our volunteer, Piers's, day job. Then those who have been tracking Steve's thinking on the purchase of a new coracle will find he's made a decision (no spoilers, but you only have to go to the next page to find what his decision was).

Because most readers of the Newsletter read an on line version we've been able to include a number of pictures we think are interesting and relevant. Some from various archives and others taken only a few days ago (well this is a NEWS letter!).

The Member Survey suggested that the wildlife associated with the Navigation is important to many and we've included a couple of articles that relate to wildlife.

And Pennywort! The Trust is known by many as a result of our ongoing battle against Pennywort, a battle that began some 20 years ago and continues to this day. We're pleased to be able to talk about the various initiatives that go towards our very successful management work on Floating American Pennywort.

Certainly the most newsworthy part of this Newsletter is the return of the lighter Susan to the Navigation. Four CCT volunteers were able to be onboard Susan as she was brought from the boatyard where she'd been for 14 years, back to Heybridge Basin and to the Navigation she'd been designed to be used on. What an experience that was! We've included pictures and described the work our volunteers did at St Osyth.

Finally, and we've asked this before, please let us have some feedback on this Newsletter. Interesting? Irrelevant? Too much of some aspects? Something we might have included? And on the subject of what we might have included, how about considering writing something for one of our Newsletters? The next one will be our Winter edition.

Neil

CCT Chair and CCT Trustee

Steve gives us an update on his purchase of his new coracle.

As most of us are aware there is a “new wonder material” called glass fibre. Resilient, hard wearing and waterproof. Perfect as the material for a modern coracle. Kind of the opposite of the traditional covering on my old coracle. So, I’ve finally given in and bought a fibreglass coracle.

Having possibly the smallest type of craft on the Navigation I end up on some of the most interesting parts. Just me, nature and quiet solitude. Sometimes with a nice dappled sunlight glinting through the trees and off the water, which is especially true of the Langford Cut near Beeleigh Falls. The water is only a foot deep, but the mud is bottomless, perfect for fibreglass coracles. I can now bounce off and glide over all the fallen trees and branches without fear of a sudden water feature appearing in the bottom.

Being lighter is handy too, as working on the Baddow Meads involves a long walk/carry to where we are going to work.



So all in all a good purchase. Though not quite traditional. Fibreglass-reinforced plastic has been around since the 1930s and has been used for coracle making since the 1970s, so it depends on your own definition of ‘traditional’.

If anyone wants to try their hand at paddling in my coracle I can be contacted through the CCT web page.

Steve

CCT Work Party Volunteer

You reach parts (of the Navigation) that other water craft can't reach! Thanks, Steve.

Another of our volunteers, Piers, tells us about his daytime-job as a Plant Health and Seeds Inspector.

My work as a Plant Health and Seeds Inspector involves checking imported plants, produce, seed, wood packaging and occasional hand luggage passing through the ports, airports and postal depots across London and East Anglia. These inspections usually take place at designated Border Control Posts (BCPs) which are dedicated bio-secure facilities where consignments can be safely presented for inspection prior to clearing customs and entering Great Britain.

These consignments could consist of several shipping containers of produce that have travelled thousands of miles from South America, or lorries with plants for garden centres from Holland, or they could be small parcels.



Depending on the commodity and country and origin in question, imported plants and products require varying degrees of documentary and physical checks. These checks are based on the risk posed by the commodity to GB's own horticulture, agriculture and wider environment. For example, Citrus fruits are not regulated, but there are stringent requirements surrounding Potatoes and the risk they pose to our own agriculture.

When inspecting we are looking for regulated pests and diseases of plants, many of which are not yet present in Great Britain. High profile quarantine pests and diseases include:

Tilletia indica, also known as 'Karnal Bunt'; a fungal disease of wheat.

Xylella fastidiosa; a bacteria with a very wide range of hosts that has devastated Olive groves in Italy and Spain.

Anoplophora glabripennis, known as the Asian Longhorn Beetle; highly destructive insect pest which poses a serious threat to a wide range of broadleaved trees outside the beetle's natural range in China.

Phytophthora ramorum, a highly destructive, algae-like organism called a water mould; causing extensive damage and death to more than 150 plant species.

Bemisia tabaci, also known as Tobacco Whitefly; one of the most economically important agricultural and horticultural pests in the World, due in part to its adaptability, extreme host plant range and capacity to vector more than 110 plant pathogenic viruses.



This work at the border is complemented by surveillance and traceability audits undertaken by 'inland' inspectors. Inland Inspectors audit businesses to enable them to issue UK Plant Passports. These are official labels for the movement of regulated plants and plant products within GB, mostly between wholesalers. This scheme ensures that plants and plant products are traceable throughout the supply chain and declare compliance with plant health requirements such as freedom from pests.



How you can help

Farmers and growers, gardeners and members of the public are encouraged to remain vigilant for signs of notifiable pests and diseases. Potential sightings can be reported to APHA by telephoning 0300 1000 313 or by emailing the planthealth.info@apha.gov.uk.

Piers

CCT Work Party Volunteer

When Piers isn't involved during the week checking for plants that should not be imported he's regularly out on the water with us, removing Floating American Pennywort - a plant we wish hadn't been imported for sale in garden centres 25 years ago!

Our Chelmer Canal Trust pictorial Archives are extensive. However, Chas is renowned for seeking out even more pictures relevant to the Navigation. Chas writes:

"Some interesting photos popped up on the Chelmsford Remembered page of Facebook the other day. They were shared from a post made by Andrew Clarke of The Foxearth & District Local History Society.

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This one of
Moulsham Mill
dates back to 1938,
before the river
Chelmer was
diverted



The other two show Barnes Mill a year later in 1939.



Thanks Chas. Your interest in, and support for, the Navigation are impressive.

The Chelmer Canal Trust Member Survey.

As a member organisation it's important to the Management Board of Trustees that what we do and the way we develop matches what our members want. Earlier this year we asked members to complete a Survey.



We are grateful to those members who responded. You provided us with valuable insight into the views of our members. We are so pleased that there was such a high degree of positivity and support. Here's a synopsis of what you told us:

- Many of you were interested in the Navigation for recreation on, in or beside the Navigation with a significant number being interested in the ecology
- Similarly, the same interest was shown in the Chelmer Valley.
- Your reasons for being a member of the Trust ranged across: a general interest in the Navigation, participation in work parties, attendance at evening talks and events, receipt of our CCT Newsletter, a desire to be supportive of a charity with such aims and an association with/participation in an organisation with an interest in the Navigation

- There was strong support for us being vocal (newspapers, tv and social media) in confronting inappropriate ‘developments’ near the Navigation or in the Chelmer Valley as well as us strongly advocating for the protection of the natural environment of the Chelmer Valley and directly lobbying local politicians on issues such as Planning and Strategic development.
- You felt it was important that we had an up-to-date Chelmer Canal Trust website and a presence on social media, although disappointingly about 40% of members visited the website less than once a month and less than half of you were ‘friends’ of the Trust on Facebook.
- You felt that our Chelmer Canal Trust Newsletter helped to keep you informed about the Trust and a very high proportion of you always read the Newsletter (YOU included!).
- You felt that what you got for paying your subscription was fair and that the Trustees were managing the Trust well.
- A common theme in the ‘what additions and developments’ and ‘other comments’ sections was a Youth Section (maybe because we’d given it as an example) along with a range of helpful suggestions all of which the Board is either working on already or will be exploring soon.

Thanks for your time and your feedback which we will use in the future planning of the Chelmer Canal Trust.

We'll be taking your views into account as we move on and grow the Chelmer Canal Trust, empowered by your valuable feedback.

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CCT volunteer Keith regularly walks along the Navigation. Here's a reflection about one species he sees.

Take a walk along the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation towpath anywhere between Springfield Lock and Heybridge Basin in May or early June and you will most likely hear one of our most distinctive bird calls, the call of the Cuckoo or to be more precise the male Cuckoo.

Cuckoos lay their egg in the nests of other birds. They always use the nests of the species of bird they themselves were raised by. In Britain the Cuckoo favours the nest of three birds in particular, Reed Warbler, Dunnock and Meadow Pipit. The Navigation is home to two of these, the Reed Warbler and the Dunnock.



Along the Navigation, the area between Stonhams Lock and Little Baddow Lock is a hotspot for Cuckoos. There are areas of Common reed (Norfolk reed), which attracts Reed Warblers and in turn Cuckoos. One morning this May there were five males calling. Cuckoos are a bird that is usually heard not seen.

To look at, a Cuckoo resembles a Sparrow Hawk. It is believed that the female bird uses this resemblance to scare their target species from their nests. With the occupants gone, the Cuckoo has time to lay her egg.

Your wildlife knowledge is always appreciated, Keith.

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Take a Walk on the Wild(life) Side.

That's just what a group of us did recently for CCT's summer evening event.

Having worked for many years for Essex Wildlife Trust, and with an impressive personal interest in wildlife, Dave Smart took us on a two-hour guided tour along the Navigation. Who couldn't fail to be impressed with Dave's extensive knowledge?! Starting at Paper Mill Bridge Dave introduced us to a range of vegetation species and the value they had to the area. Burdock (though no dandelions!), and White Horehound and later on Purple Loosestrife, Cow Parsley, and Hogweed (although not Giant), Hemlock and Himalayan Balsam amongst others. Whatever it was Dave could name it. We saw Swallows that were nesting under the road bridge, talked about migration and discussed the early years of a Swift's life.



We then moved on upstream to eventually stop to listen to bird calls. Listening carefully and with Dave's skilled interpretation, we heard Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Whitethroat and Blackbirds. Further up the Navigation we heard Blackcap and Robins before making our way up to the Church Road road bridge where we saw Grey Wagtail.

Dave talked about habitat as well as the different perspectives that people have. To one person a fallen dead tree might be an eyesore that should be removed, to another it could be seen as an important home for a range of insects and birds.

Back to Paper Mill, on the way questions being asked and answered. Probably the only thing missing was the sight of an Owl patrolling across the meadowgrass. That will have to wait until next time. If you weren't able to be there you missed a treat!

Thanks for an excellent walk, Dave.

Work Boat Skipper Training.

Congratulations to four newly-trained work boat skippers!

Ensuring that we work in safe and appropriate ways guides what we do at our regular CCT Work Parties. A key role at a work party is that of the Work Boat Skipper. Over the years we've tried out several formal training courses but, despite suggesting that they would be appropriate, they haven't dealt with key aspects of safe-working at work parties.

Wanting to ensure that we provide our CCT skippers with the best possible training we developed our own course. A few weeks ago we ran the course for the second time.

The first part of the training took place at Heybridge Basin, including the opportunity to ‘drive’ Buster, the work boat we jointly own with Essex Waterways Ltd. We then moved on to Hoe Mill to get experience of a different type of work boat, a raider. Of course, at our monthly work parties we use both of these boats as well as work boats based at Paper Mill and Sandford.

Having more qualified work boat skippers available is a real bonus and it’s great to have these extra skippers on board (literally!).

We are looking forward to our newly-qualified skippers skippering work boats during our monthly work parties.

Pennywort Patrol.

Another successful funding bid! We reported in the winter newsletter that we’d been successful in getting grants to pay for more tools and for extra yellow boom – both of them invaluable in our management of Floating American Pennywort.

A third funding bid in which we were successful, jointly with Essex Waterways Ltd., was to facilitate a regular Pennywort Patrol. The aim is for us to be able to have accurate, ongoing, intelligence about how much pennywort is growing and where. The project has now kicked off! Operating one day per week, the newly-appointed member of staff from Essex Waterways works with a CCT volunteer to survey a section of the Navigation. Over four weeks, the time between our monthly CCT work parties, all of the Navigation will have been surveyed meaning that we can direct our work parties to the locations where we can have the biggest impact.

Ensuring that the results of our surveying are recorded and available to others is important. There are a range of recording apps available. One that is specifically designed for groups like ours, dealing with Invasive Non Native Species, is ‘INNSmapper’. If you are interested in local records, including reports made by our Pennywort Patrollers, take a look at the app. It’s free and there are no adverts. (and part of the development was paid for by Essex and Suffolk Water through their parent company Northumbrian Water).

Already we are seeing the benefits. Our Pennywort Patrollers have been out and about on their weekly session for several weeks now. If they find small strands of pennywort they whip them out. If they find larger rafts they record them and we can arrange that a work party deals with them as soon as possible.



More on items relevant to the Chelmer Valley - JA Baker and ‘The Peregrine’

In our Winter Newsletter William considered Heritage and Landscapes and referred to the work of J A Baker who was born and lived most of his life in Chelmsford. Baker spent a lot of time in the Chelmer Valley where he followed and studied Peregrine Falcons, leading to him writing the famous book ‘The Peregrine’ published in 1967. The book became an immediate success with reviews calling it a masterpiece of nature writing and it going on to win several awards

More recently the book has been voted one of the UK’s top ten favourite nature books.

The description above is taken from the Chelmsford Museum's website, introducing one of their current exhibitions 'Restless Brilliance: the Story of JA Baker and The Peregrine'. The free exhibition is on until 3rd November at the museum in Oaklands Park, Chelmsford and well worth a visit. It includes never-before-seen-in-public archive material from the Albert Sloman Library at the University of Essex.

Restless Brilliance: The Story of J.A. Baker and The Peregrine



Venue
[Chelmsford Museum](#)

Date
23 March 2024
to 03 November 2024

Time
10am to 5pm
everyday

Price
Free

Associated with the exhibition are two events that Chelmer Canal Trust members might find interesting. On 18th July at 5.30 pm there's a talk by Peregrine and Raptor expert Peter Merchant and Michael Padmore of Colchester Natural History Society. They will tell the story of how Peregrine Falcons have made a successful return to the East Anglian countryside. For £6 you can hear the talk, get tea and coffee and can look round the JA Baker exhibition.

Then on 10th August there's an opportunity to join David Simmons for a 3 ¼ mile walk that traces Baker's links to Admirals Park and Writtle and which visits some of the sites mentioned in Bakers' letters and diaries. The walk is free. Meet at Tower Gardens Car Park, CM1 2PL for a 10.30 am start.

Pennywort Posters






Help stop the spread of FLOATING AMERICAN PENNYWORT!

within a few weeks
in the summer
months a few small
strands can grow
into rafts which
block the
Navigation




Floating American Pennywort threatens the activities of all users of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation – boaters, canoeists, paddleboarders, anglers, etc. It also affects the natural environment. The dense mats often out-compete native aquatic plants and clog waterways. It blocks light, preventing growth of other plant species. It can lead to oxygen depletion in the water and die-back increases nutrient levels. By absorbing sunlight it raises water temperatures.



If you see Floating American Pennywort in the Navigation please remove it and leave it on the bank where any small critters can make their way back into the water.

- Remove it by hand or with a rake or boathook.
- Try not to break it up and catch anything that gets away (it only needs one fragment of stalk with a leaf attached to grow into a huge raft).

It's only by removing all signs of Pennywort that we'll keep the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation clear of this invasive weed. Please help!

If you'd like to take part in an organised pennywort-removing work party contact the Chelmer Canal Trust for details of their regular events: <http://www.chelmercanaltrust.co.uk>

To help stop the spread of invasive non-native species don't forget to  craft, equipment and cloths

Leaflet produced by the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Local Action Group.

Yes – another pennywort initiative!

This one is about raising awareness so that hopefully others will join in with the removal of Pennywort. Along with our partners in the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Local Action Group we've designed and printed a poster and flyer intended to raise awareness of pennywort and the problems it will cause if left. We are hopeful that users of the Navigation will respond and play their part in helping rid the Navigation of Pennywort. If everyone who uses the Navigation, for whatever reason, removed a strand of Pennywort each time they visited we'd be well on our way to winning the Pennywort Battle.

We've got lots of these posters available in A3 and A4 formats as well as A5 flyers. If you know of somewhere where they would have an impact please get in touch and we'll send you some. If you want to download your own electronic version, especially if you can email, WhatsApp, etc., it to others, then you can find it here: <https://tinyurl.com/pennywortflyer>

Susan (we are talking about 'Susan' the C&B Navigation lighter!)



Another chapter in Susan's history commenced on 20th June this year! Susan returned to the Navigation!

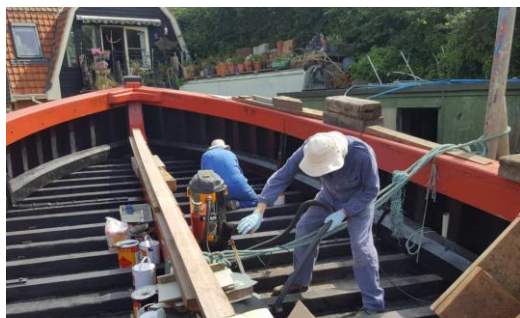
In May 2010, in a very sorry state, leaking through the rotting timbers, Susan exited the sea lock at Heybridge bound for the St Osyth boatyard for restoration of some of the woodwork. Little did anyone know how extensive the work would be to get her back to a state where she could safely be floated and used. Nor was there much idea in 2010 of how much it was eventually going to cost.

Spending many years in a dry dock at St Osyth, Susan's restoration was dependent on successful grant applications and donations. As funds allowed, the work went through several stages:

- Stage 1. - Replacement of the main keel (keelson) - Completed July 2010.
- Stage 2. - Replacement of ribs and upstands as necessary - Completed October 2014.
- Stage 3. - Replacement of propeller tunnel frame. - Completed October 2014.
- Stage 4. - Re-planking the hull - Completed February 2019.
- Stage 5. - Restoration of the gunwales and superstructure - Commenced July 2020.
- Stage 6. - Plugging of hundreds of recessed holes and painting inside and out - Commenced March 2022
- Stage 7. - Replacement of the propeller shaft and propellor. - Commenced December 2023.

Playing such a significant part in the Navigation's history the Chelmer Canal Trust has had an ongoing interest in Susan's progress. We've supported Susan's development having a Trustee of CCT sitting as a Trustee of The Susan Trust and we've made a significant donation towards work on Susan.

But even so we didn't feel that was enough and in 2022 we got stuck in, literally, to hopefully stimulate faster progress towards Susan's completion. Over several work parties we removed a significant amount of 'pigeon guano' from inside Susan and on the outside of the hull glued plugs into hundreds of holes created to recess nails and bolts



We painted primer and top coat on the outside and inside of the hull. In the winter we were in the dry dock where, despite being covered, it was bitterly cold.

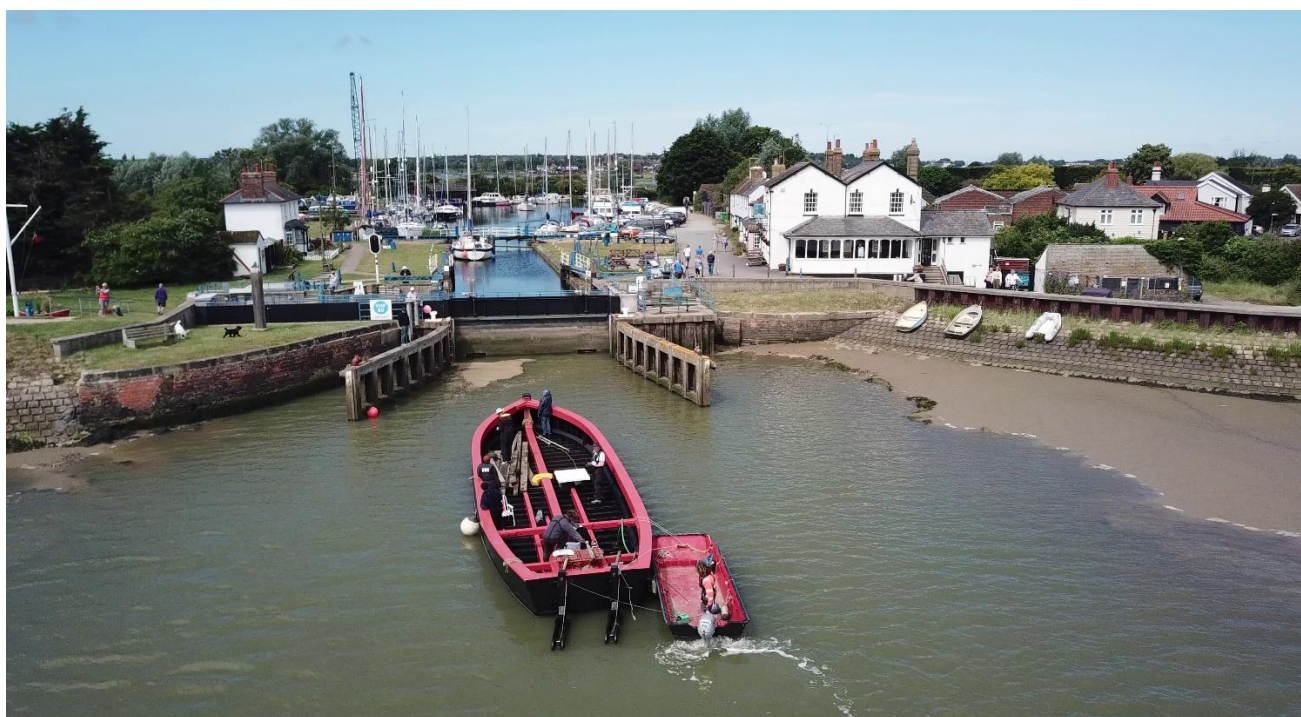
In the summer, after the dry dock had sunk (with Susan in it!) and when she was on the slipway, painting black tar varnish in the hot sun was, shall we say, "challenging".

A bit of a pause while an issue with the stern tube was sorted. The answer was the purchase and fitting of a brand new stern tube and propellor. Meaning that at that point all of the work needed to be done while Susan was out of the water had been done AND SHE COULD RETURN TO THE NAVIGATION!

On a perfect day, with a calm sea, four of our Chelmer Canal Trust volunteers took part in Susan's return from St Osyth to the Navigation, representing the many CCT volunteers who had been prepared to go to St Osyth and work on Susan. They had shown commitment and determination, working with messy materials under demanding conditions. Despite being offered reimbursement of travel expenses no one claimed them. What brilliant volunteers we have!



And from the air - Susan being moved towards the dolphin to await being locked into Heybridge Basin 14 years after leaving.



Thanks to Duncan, our Chelmer Canal Trust representative on the Susan Trust Board and the many volunteers who put in the extra work that enabled Susan to return to the Navigation.

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 the Chair here: 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 Winter 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

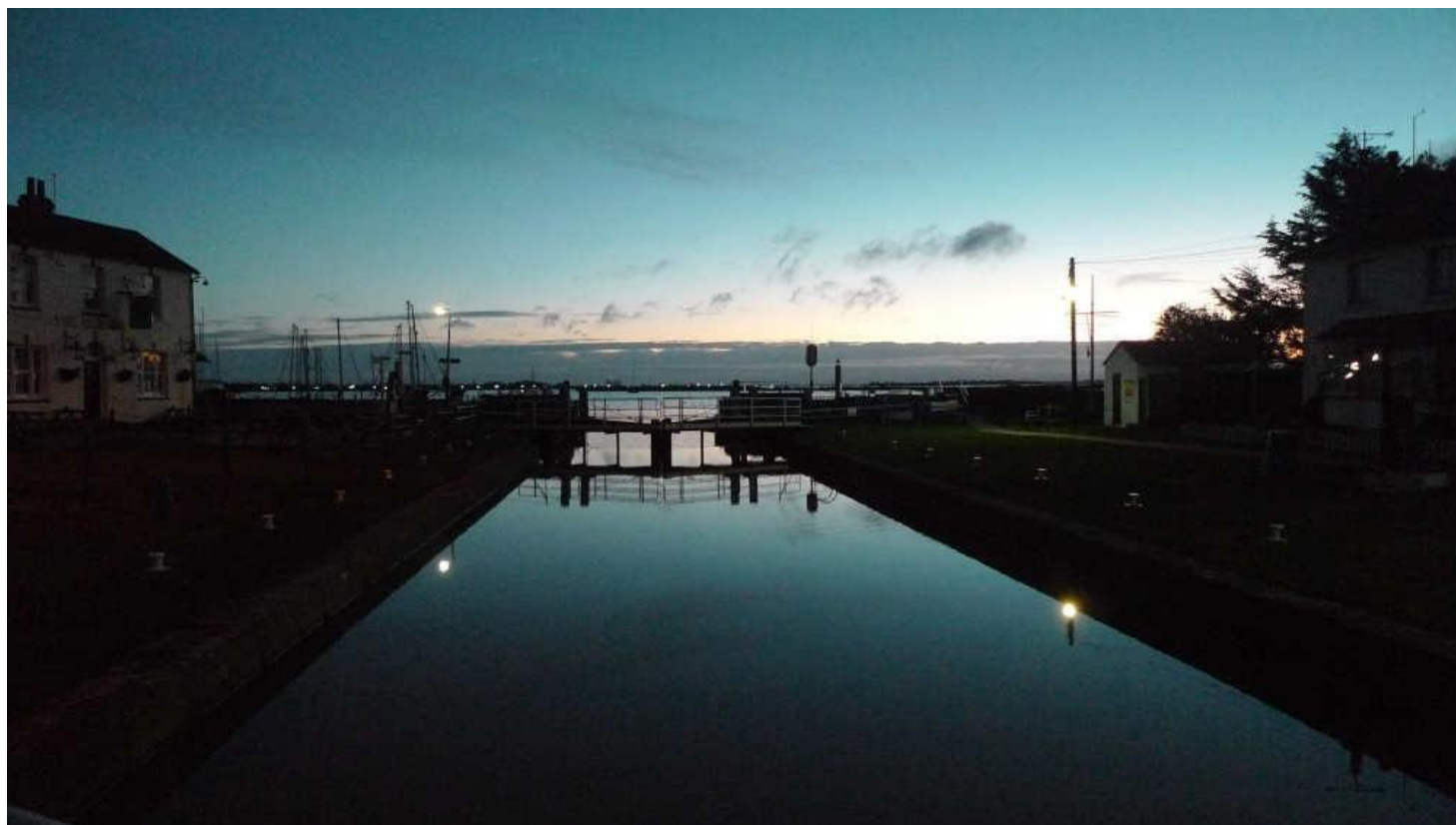
Do you want to contact us or keep in touch with us?

Visit our website: <https://chelmercanaltrust.co.uk>. Follow us on Facebook: @ChelmerCanalTrust

Contact us

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By Email: enquiries@chelmercanaltrust.co.uk



The Sea Lock at Heybridge just before sunrise