



# Chelmer Canal Trust Newsletter

## December 2024



Issue No 68

Time for another Chelmer Canal Trust Newsletter!

And an opportunity to mention the Festive Season. On behalf of the Chelmer Canal Trust it is my great pleasure to send you best wishes for Christmas and the New Year. May your spirits be bright!

It's also that time of year when we think about the past year and look forward to the next.

Reflecting on the past year it's been a good one for the Chelmer Canal Trust – as hopefully you will begin to understand as you read through this Newsletter. Again, we hope it contains articles that interest you and keeps you informed about the excellent things the Trust is doing. Please consider writing something for the Summer Edition. And please give us some feedback on what you think of this Newsletter. There's not a lot of point us putting it together if it's falling on deaf ears!

What news is there in this Newsletter? Well, here's some of it.....

William has been on his summer holidays and taken the opportunity to explore another waterway.

Chas has not only taken part in activities along the Navigation, he's also been collecting archive pics to do with the Navigation; we've included a couple of these

The Lighter Susan is back on the Navigation and having further work on her progressed, the hope being that she'll be ready to take passengers on trips along the Navigation in 2025.

Of course, our weedbusting efforts have continued with great success. Our thanks go to our loyal work party volunteers. This year we've stepped up our weedbusting another notch as a result of including sub aqua divers on our monthly work parties, our Pennywort Patrol initiative has exceeded expectations and we've been working with a specialist contractor to use herbicide to control Pennywort where other techniques aren't effective.

During the year we've hosted a number of interesting talks that have been appreciated by members who have taken part both in person and online. And we've given talks to organisations who have shown an interest in knowing more about the Chelmer Canal Trust, the Navigation and the Chelmer Valley.

As well as the type of articles we've become used to in our Chelmer Canal Trust Newsletters we've included three which depart from the norm. We've got the Record Review of a single featuring the Chelmer and Blackwater, details of a holiday home for hire, and our own Agony Aunt, Bea gives advice to worried readers about problems they have in their lives relevant to CCT (very tongue in cheek!).

Enjoy reading this Newsletter. And please give us some feedback.

**Neil**

**CCT Chair and CCT Trustee**

*Chas has many associations with the Navigation. As an EWL Volunteer in this article he describes the replacement of the top lock gates at Sandford.*

The last time the top gates were replaced was in 2003. After twenty years in place the north bank gates were starting to rot away. Replacement of gates is a two-stage process, the first stage being the measuring-up of the existing gates to ensure that the new gates are made to the correct size. And the second stage being the removal of the old gates and installation of the new ones.

Stage One of this gate-replacement took place in May 2024. On 3<sup>rd</sup> May Julie (containing the dam and Hares fencing) and Dredger (housing the HIAB crane) were moved from their base at Hoe Mill to Sandford. A dam, along with a tarpaulin and sandbags, was put in place to enable the water to be drained from the working area in the lock, to allow access to the lock gates for the measuring up which took place on 16<sup>th</sup> May.



Work was carried out by Green Oak Bespoke Buildings from Portsmouth. The gates are made out of Green Oak, which complies with the rules laid down by English Heritage. The top gates cost in the region of £40,000



While this was going on, EWL spent time removing metal parts that can be salvaged. At the same time, it was interesting to see the brickwork housing the ground paddles - something that you cannot see under normal conditions.

Once the measurements had been taken, the watertight tarpaulin was removed to enable the lock to refill and the dam lifted back onto Julie so that both works boats could return to their base at Hoe Mill on 23<sup>rd</sup> May.

Stage 2 started on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 with a lorry arriving at 11 am with a HIAB (= built-in crane) to lift the gates and beams onto Julie, which was sitting nearby as a platform to receive them.

Two EWL volunteers were present, acting as banksmen to divert members of the public whilst the unloading was taking place.

While this was going on, EWL employees were busy using the HIAB on Dredger to remove the old gates. No sooner had the lorry unloaded its cargo onto Julie than Dredger was reversing out of the lock with the old gates, which were then placed onto the bank and pulled out of the way.



With its job done, the lorry left and the new gates could be located into their new home. Once in place it was time to go and get the beams to be fitted on top of the gates. It was amazing how well the beams just slotted into place. It all seemed to go like clockwork!



The next 2 days were spent cutting the mitre (the part where the gates meet) to form a watertight seal and other adjustments are made due to the large size of the gates and 227 years of wear and tear on the old stonework. Also new capping boards were fitted onto the cill to form a watertight seal at the bottom of the gates.

All in all, replacing a new set of gates in just 3 days is impressive! A job well done!

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*William has been off on his Summer Hols in Norfolk. Here's his description of finding Peace, and Pennywort, during a canoe trip.*

The North Walsham and Dilham canal once linked the town of North Walsham to the Norfolk Broads. Uniquely this was a sailing canal for Norfolk Wherries, and consequently there are no towpaths, making foot access not always easy and sometimes impossible. Since the Wherry traffic ceased, mature trees have been allowed to grow up along the banks, so it is difficult to imagine tall-masted sailing boats returning here any time soon.

The North Walsham and Dilham Canal Trust is working hard to restore as much of the canal as they can. Two sections are navigable and boat trips are run on each section, but this year we decided we wanted to navigate independently so we tried out the Canoe Hire service at Dilham Hall.

Provided with appropriate buoyancy aids and a Canadian canoe, we set off paddling upstream in search of the first lock on the canal, Honing Lock. On the route passing a large channel, which according to the map is either the East Ruston Branch, or the Hundred Stream. We decided to investigate where this went on the way back, as the plan was to eat our lunch near the lock.



The way up to the lock is relatively clear and easily navigable in a canoe or paddle board, but there are some bends where the canal looks like a dead end until you get close. Disturbingly for one who is often on CCT Work Parties there were many patches of pennywort on the way. In some cases, the leaves looked immature and brown, possibly indicating that herbicide has been used here to control the dreaded weed, but in other places it was vigorous and lush!

When we reached Honing Lock another party were busy portaging their canoe around the lock, but it wasn't long before they were back again having found the next pound not as navigable as the first. We were content to disembark and take a look at Honing lock and its potential for future restoration. After a pleasant lunch in the shade of the trees, we headed back to investigate the East Ruston Branch.





This was clearly a route less travelled, and more of a challenge to our navigational skills. We were finally forced to turn back by a massive uncontrolled raft of thick lush pennywort, which had grown bank to bank and was reminiscent of the bad old days on the Chelmer before we had got to grips with the problem.

Turning back, we headed downstream to the mouth of the canal, where it meets the Norfolk Broads just above Wayford Bridge.

This junction is also the boundary with the waters under the control of the Broads Authority. We had been warned that if we ventured onto these waters we might have to pay for an additional day license. Sure enough, almost as soon as we had nosed out of the mouth of the canal, a large official looking Broads Authority launch was upon us, but they passed by barely even slowing down, so perhaps they had decided to let us off this time.



After a short while exploring a very small section of the Norfolk broads, arms were getting tired and it was time to head home. The signage on the mouth of the canal is interestingly worded. It seems they want to welcome visitors, but it is not at all clear which unpowered vessels are permitted or prohibited. It all seems to be down to interpretation. We did notice a couple of private moorings for full sized cruisers within the curtilage of the canal, so there are clearly some exceptions as well.

I think the essential point is that this canal desires to exist on its own merits as a local amenity, and not just as an extension of The Broads. So far it is succeeding in this aim. It certainly feels very different to the waterway tourism behemoth adjoining. Altogether a very nice and interesting day out. Highly recommended if you are in the area. Seeing pennywort in other places is always a frustrating experience, but it does highlight how much progress our work parties have made in mitigating the problem on the Chelmer over many years.

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### *William becomes CCT's own John Peel, describing a new single about Paper Mill Lock by a local band 'The Remedy'.*

I'm not sure if our CCT Newsletters have ever published a record review before, but in September a new single release popped up on the social media feeds for anyone who the algorithm deemed suitably interested in the Chelmer and Blackwater. What could this be? A new edgy lament about the tenacity of pennywort, or those annoying bags of the unspeakable that some dog walkers like to adorn rural bushes with? No!

It turns out that this local band, in addition to a song in the catalogue about the Maldon Mud Race, have released a very slickly produced single and shiny music video, shot on location at Paper Mill Lock! The video must have been shot midweek outside of the school holidays because the weather is pleasant and

sunny, while miraculously the band have managed to find a pleasant spot to sit under the Bat Willows and sing together in perfect solitude.



The style is ultra middle-of-the-road easy listening, so this song would feel equally at home in just about any decade since the 1950s. It is well played, well sung and very professionally produced. The lyrics however feel as if they have been copied and pasted straight from a sales brochure for the Old Stables Tea Room, raising a suspicion of sponsorship funding of the very high production values. But perhaps we should be forgiving. After all it is not every day that a band release a new single inspired by the beauty of our favourite waterway. Let's hope more bands come to the banks of the Chelmer and are even inspired to write a future number one!

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*Chas is an avid collector of pictures relevant to the Navigation. Here are a couple, sent in by Chas, of Wally Pavelin who brought timber from Heybridge Basin to the Brown and Sons timber yard beside Springfield Basin.*



Does anyone have any idea what year these pics might have been taken?

*Pennywort - it's part of CCT's DNA! We've been working to remove Floating American Pennywort from the Navigation for more than 20 years. Here are a few of the initiatives that have contributed to our work this year:*

### *1. Pennywort patrol*

In the Summer 2024 edition of the Newsletter we reported on the start of Pennywort Patrol. This initiative had come about as a result of a successful funding bid from Essex and Suffolk Water's Branch Out Fund. The funding allowed a member of staff employed by Essex Waterways Ltd to be accompanied by a Chelmer Canal Trust volunteer (a different one each week) to both survey a section of the Navigation and, where possible, remove strands and small rafts of pennywort

The initiative has been impressively successful! It has meant that for six months of the year, ending at the end of October, the whole length of the Navigation has been surveyed each month.



Survey results have been recorded online on the INNSMapper App. Meaning that anyone who uses the App can view the results. More detailed information has been recorded locally, meaning that we've been able to direct the efforts at our monthly CCT Work Parties where they are needed most. We've contributed 176 volunteer-hours to Pennywort Patrol. That's worth over £2,000!

Given the success of the project we are hopeful that a repeat funding application next year will lead to Pennywort Patrol being able to run in 2025.



## 2. Our regular monthly Chelmer Canal Trust work parties – with added divers!

We've adapted the way we've managed Floating American Pennywort progressively through experience, changing our techniques to gain best effect and adding to our repertoire of pennywort-removal methods.

The mainstay of our work has been volunteers on the water and volunteers on the bank. Over the years they've been brilliant and done amazing work.

From time to time we'll have also had a volunteer willing to work in waders in the water. That always makes a difference. However, the 'in the water' work has gone up several notches over the past few work parties due to the superb input from divers from the Chelmsford Sub Aqua Diving Club. These guys come along equipped to be in and under the water. They soon got the hang of removing pennywort – whether it was in large rafts or small strands growing in the bankside vegetation.



Huge thanks to the divers who have become welcome participants in our CCT work parties, not just to be in the water removing pennywort, but also on the bank, both 'spotting' the divers and also helping drag pennywort out of the water and up the bank. A real team effort with the divers and our own volunteers making a huge difference. At one point those of us hauling freed weed onto the work boat had to ask the divers to slow down – they were releasing weed into the flowing river faster than we could take it on board.

## 3. Herbicide application.

Using herbicide to control Floating American Pennywort has always been contentious. Using a potentially dangerous chemical in and around the Navigation goes against the grain. However, there are some locations where hand-pulling just doesn't work. And that means that there are areas that continue to generate new growths of pennywort that infect the rest of the system. Some of our CCT volunteers have been trained, and have the required certification, to use herbicides on water. But we've been reluctant to actually put the training into practice.

However, over several years, funding from Essex and Suffolk Water has meant that a specialist contractor has been available. This year we have established a good working relationship with a new contractor, Richard who has worked with us on Pennywort Patrols to deal with areas where hand-pulling isn't practical or effective. The Langford Cut is first on our list, along with other areas where, despite our best efforts, Pennywort manages to hang on in.



## *The latest on Susan.*

In the Summer Newsletter we reported on the fact that the Lighter 'Susan', after something like 14 years in dry dock at St Osyth, had returned to the Navigation. Chelmer Canal Trust volunteers made a number of trips to Susan, funded themselves, to clean out the considerable amount of 'guano' inside her, glue and plug thousands of holes in her hull and paint her inside and out with several coats of specialist paint. Some of our volunteers were also on board when Susan was brought from Brightlingsea to Heybridge Basin.



One of the last wooden lighters that worked the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Susan was not just returning home, but also getting ready to resume being a working craft on the Navigation. Perfect 'heritage'. Looking very smart she's been moored at several locations at Heybridge while further work towards her completion is carried out.

During the summer the original engine, having been on display at the Sandford Mill museum (see the Summer Newsletter), was brought down to Heybridge and craned into Susan. Another milestone in Susan's refurbishment.



Using engineer Grant's excellent engineering skills not only has the engine been installed, but after much tinkering, fettling and cleaning the engine has actually been running! Further progress has been made by way of the installation of floorboards, moving ever-closer to the day she'll be back in operation along the waters that she last knew many years ago.

We've been fortunate to have sight of the Log of the second trial of Susan after she'd been built, conducted on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1954. Loaded with 10 tons of gravel she was tested along a 'measured mile' from Heybridge Basin to Wave Bridge. The time taken for the first run was 31 ½ minutes, According to the log a speed of 2.33 miles per hour. Some adjustments were made to the tunnel access box to reduce cavitation and the return run was completed in 23 minutes; a speed, according to the log, of 3.12 miles per hour.

There's a video of a much more recent performance trial of Susan. This one only a few weeks ago, 60 ½ years after the one described above. To view it online [click on this link](#).

If all goes well Susan will be ready to take passengers on board during 2025. Susan will join her sisters Victoria, Blackwater Dawn and Albert in the fleet of Trip Boats operated by Essex Waterways Ltd.

If you are visiting Heybridge Basin look out for Susan. She's likely to either be at a berth near the crane, or on the opposite side of Heybridge Basin, moored against Francoise.



## *Talks we've had and talks we've given!*



Every year we aim to invite speakers to our area to give talks on topics that we think will be of interest to our members. And it's great that we have members turning up at Moulsham Mill as well as joining the talk online. We aim to make all of our talks available through Videos available in the Library Section of our Chelmer Canal Trust website. [Click here](#) to see what's available.

During 2024 we've put on three talks as well as a guided summer walk for our Chelmer Canal Trust members and guests.

27<sup>th</sup> February: The Chelmer and Blackwater Against the Odds. An illustrated talk by Neil Frost

18<sup>th</sup> June: A walk on the Wild(life) side. A guided walk from Paper Mill led by Dave Smart

17<sup>th</sup> September: An update on Susan. An illustrated talk by Roy Chandler.

12<sup>th</sup> November: Narrowboats on the Thames. An illustrated talk by Simon Judge



During 2024 there has been a welcome interest in the Chelmer Canal Trust, in the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation and in the Chelmer Valley and we've delivered these talks:

1<sup>st</sup> February. Tiptree U3A. An illustrated talk on the history of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation

4<sup>th</sup> June: Chelmsford Sub Aqua Club. An illustrated talk on the history of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation

12<sup>th</sup> August. Billericay 41 Club. A guided walk around Springfield basin and the City's Rivers

6<sup>th</sup> November. South Woodham Ferrers local History Society. An illustrated talk on the history of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation

28<sup>th</sup> November. Mersea Island Local Wildlife Forum. An illustrated talk on the history of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation



Part of our organisation's 'mission' is to make others aware of the Navigation, including its history, and giving talks to groups such as those above means that we can appropriately 'spread the word' as well as, potentially, getting more support for the Trust and for the Navigation. There's also the added bonus that generally when we give a talk to a group they make a donation to the Chelmer Canal Trust – welcome additional income!

### Overnight stays at Paper Mill.

It is well-known that what is now the brick-built part of the EWL Office at Paper Mill was originally the bargemen's bothy. A place where they could get the fire going, cook some food and snugly bed down for the night while their horses were stabled at the other side of the lock in what is now the Tea Rooms.

If you fancy a few snug nights at Paper Mill, or maybe you have friends visiting and need somewhere for them to stay, overnight stays are now possible again! The 'Lodge' on Treasure Island can be rented for short stays. Here's the advertising blurb:



Step inside the lodge and you'll find a spacious, open-plan living area with big glass patio doors that let in plenty of natural light. The inviting lounge area with its big comfy sofa is the perfect spot to put your feet up after a day enjoying the outdoors. There's also a fully-equipped kitchen with everything you'll need to rustle up delicious meals or to prepare a picnic for a day's exploring. Enjoy your meals at the table indoors or take them out onto the deck and soak up the views of the river and the weir while you eat.

There's a cosy double bedroom decorated in neutral tones and soft lighting, creating a relaxing space where you can unwind at the end of the day. There's also a large ensuite shower room where you'll find fluffy towels waiting for you and a walk-in shower. If you need an extra bit of sleeping space, the sofa in the lounge can be converted into a bed, suitable for another two guests.

Interested? Search for the property and you'll find a number of holiday agencies advertising it. A week in December will cost you £969.



*Our own Chelmer Canal Trust Agony Aunt Bea Leigh gives free advice to a few members' over the problems they've written in about.*

*Dear Agony Aunt Bea. I've just retired and in the winter months I find I hardly get out of the house and spend most of the day in front of the T.V. Is this a good way to spend my life? Desmond from Danbury.*

*Bea responds: Pull yourself together Desmond! Get a life! You've got something far more attractive than daytime TV on your doorstep. Get yourself down to Paper Mill and take a walk along the towpath. Enjoy the natural environment. And for an extra boost think about volunteering with EWL or CCT. Doing voluntary activities outside with others is proven to be good for your physical and mental health.*

*Dear Agony Aunt Bea. My husband spends a lot of time away from home. He's passionate about what he says is birdwatching with his friends, looking for Peregrine Falcons in the Chelmer Valley. I'm not sure I believe him. What should I do? Chloe from Colchester.*

*Bea responds: Chloe. Perhaps you need to understand your husband more? Get a copy of 'The Peregrine' by JA Baker. Such luminaries as Richard Mabey, Robert Macfarlane, Ted Hughes and Andrew Motion have cited this as one of the most important books in 20th Century nature writing. Perhaps reading that book that will help in understanding his passion. And maybe a bit of it will rub off on you. Sounds like you need it!*

*Dear Agony Aunt Bea. Please help me. It's a bit embarrassing. I think I've become addicted to Chelmer Canal Trust work parties. I look forward to getting the emails they send out, to letting them know I'll be able to be there. And then the experience of taking part. Is this normal? Harry from Harlow.*

*Bea responds: Harry. It sounds like you are suffering from a condition known as 'Fun-Time' (Feeling Unusually Nurtured - Time in My Environment). There's nothing to worry about. It affects quite a few CCT members and is perfectly normal. Just make sure you keep the first Saturday of every month free and you'll be able to indulge your Fun-Time all you want.*



### **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 includes more and more 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](mailto:neil@chelmercanaltrust.co.uk)

### **Are you interested in joining one of our Work Parties?**

Contact Work Party organiser Neil: [neil@chelmercanaltrust.co.uk](mailto: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](mailto: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

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