



S&N News

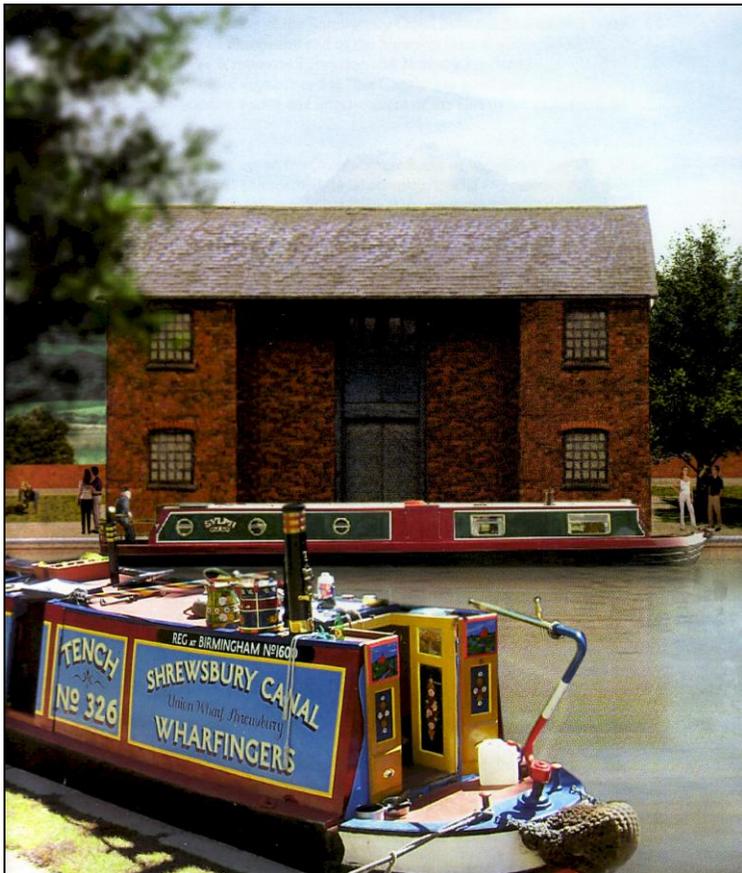
Autumn 2007

www.sncanal.org.uk

Issue 28

The Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust is a Registered Charity, no. 1088706 and a Registered Company, limited by guarantee, no. 4075920.

Patrons: John Craven OBE & Nick Owen



*Trust Chairman's narrow boat, Tench, in Wappenshall basin.
Unfortunately only an artist's impression can put the boat, water and building together but please help to try to make this a reality (see page 6)*

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The views expressed by contributors to S&News do not necessarily represent the views or policies of The Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust.

Electronic S&News

If you would prefer to receive S&News as an Adobe Acrobat attachment to an email, please email 'news@sncanal.org.uk' with the subject as 'Email S&News'. This version will be in colour and received earlier than the printed version.

Membership

We are very pleased to welcome as individual and family members:

- Denis & Janet Farmer of Whitchurch, Shropshire
 - Michael & Christina Birch of Newport, Shropshire
 - Kenneth Hughes of Newport, Shropshire
 - John Hesbrook of Newport, Shropshire
 - Alistair Price & Family of Shrewsbury
 - Cecilia Allmark of Shrewsbury
 - Jean & Brian Turner of Market Drayton, Shropshire
 - Craig & Veronica Charles of Shrewsbury
 - Ray & Janet Roberts of Shrewsbury
 - Robert & Carol Mills & Family of Shrewsbury
 - Stephen & Natalie Taylor of Newport, Shropshire
 - Chas & Sherie Warren & Family of Shrewsbury
 - Joyce Harris of Shrewsbury
 - Stuart & Valerie Ray of Church Stretton, Shropshire
-

Dates for Your Diary

Please also watch the website for updates and further details (Events page).

- ◆ **Thursday 15th Nov 2007** – 8.00p.m - Trustees' meeting – Newport *
- ◆ **Thursday 17th Jan 2008** – 7.30p.m - Trustees' meeting – Shrewsbury *
- ◆ **Saturday 23rd Feb 2008** – Visit to Ditherington Flax Mill (see page 5)
- ◆ **Saturday 15th March 2008** – AGM and Members' Day at Upton Magna Village Hall (see below)

* Please contact the Secretary to confirm date and location if you would like to attend. Also note that members may be asked to withdraw for certain confidential items

S&News & Advertising

Regular readers may notice a change in the quality of production in this issue of S&News. This change inevitably comes at a slightly increased cost but in order to defray the increase it is intended to introduce some limited advertising in S&News. It is also hoped to introduce some colour into each issue. If you or your company would like to advertise please initially contact, preferably by email, Steve Bean and.....

... if you have a little time to spare and would like to assist the Trust with finding and liaising with advertisers please also contact Steve.

2008 Annual General Meeting & Members' Day

This will take place on Saturday 15th March 2008.

Provisional arrangements for the day are:

- 10 am - Conducted walks along canal from Uffington
- Noon - Formal AGM in Upton Magna Village Hall
- Lunch
- 2 pm - Films/Speaker(s) to be confirmed
- 4pm - Tea and departure.

Further details will be sent to all members, but please note the date in your diary now (or as soon as you get one for Christmas!), and appear on the website.

In brief..

Ditherington Flax Mill

On the morning of Saturday 23rd February 2008 John Yates (SNCT Trustee & English Heritage) will conduct a guided tour, for members only, of the Ditherington Flax Mill in Shrewsbury. Numbers will be limited and booking will be necessary. Contact, preferably by email, Tam Hazan.

Vote For

Sustrans' Connect2 is one of the four remaining contenders for "The Peoples Millions". In our area, one of the tracks that will be opened [if they win] is along the line of the towpath of the Shrewsbury & Newport Canal in Shrewsbury. The local leaders of this initiative have been very supportive of our cause to restore the canal to water, and have been publishing our name and presence at every opportunity.



Please help them out by voting for their cause when the "ballot boxes" open. See website link for full details: <http://www.thepeoples50million.org.uk/home>

Nick De Salis

It is with great sadness that we report the death of member and work party enthusiast Nick de Salis who died peacefully at home in Much Wenlock on 22nd October. Our thoughts and condolences go out to Nick's family. A lovely gentleman.

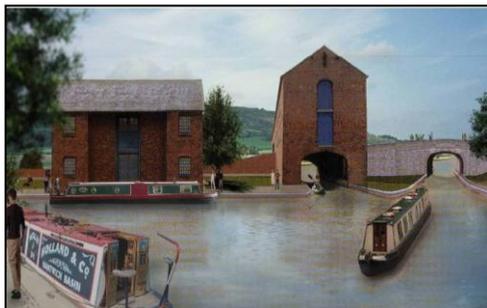
Tesco's - Friday 30th November

Can you spare an hour or so to spend at Tesco Extra, Shrewsbury on Friday 30th November? No - not shopping, but helping man the SNCT display in the foyer of the superstore. We have been granted permission by the senior manager to erect our display gazebo to show off the work, aims and ambitions of the Trust: it is a wonderful opportunity to raise our profile in the local community and to increase the public's general awareness of the canal restoration project. Perhaps even recruit more members? Initially contact Tam Hazan by email, please.

Wappenshall Update

The last issue of S&News reported on, and gave details of, the Trust's submission of a planning application to Telford & Wrekin Borough Council in respect of the two warehouses at Wappenshall Junction. The application sought to preserve the form of the buildings and bring the adjacent section of the canal back into water, whilst introducing uses that enhanced the site and provided for interpretation, education, tourism and leisure activities.

On 10th October the Council's Plans Board granted the Trust planning permission.



However, the prior application by owner of the site, for conversion of the buildings to houses, was also granted permission in August. The buildings have now been placed on the open market for sale by informal tender with a guide price of “£450,000 to £550,000” (although the seller has said they are ‘not bound to accept any offer, nor necessarily sell to the highest bidder’), with the whole process planned to be concluded by January 2008.

Despite the high price, the Trust has registered an interest in acquiring the buildings because they are felt to be so important in the restoration programme of the canals. With time extremely short the Trust Board has entered into discussions with various organisations to obtain funding to enable these buildings to be preserved as canal buildings rather than being converted into residential units.

Because of the importance of demonstrating to potential financial partners/funders that there is support for this project, not only by Trust members but local people, an appeal was launched to raise money to form the seed-corn finance for the purchase – members should have received a letter from the Trust's Vice-Chairman, Tam Hazan. All funds raised will be allocated to a separate Capital Account, which will be used towards the purchase of Wappenshall or, should this purchase prove unsuccessful, later to other property along the line of the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals. Please consider donating whatever you can afford, however large or small, as the number of supporters can be almost as important in such a campaign as the amount raised. Or, if you would prefer, pledge an amount now that you will commit to donate if the Trust's bid to purchase the buildings is successful. A donation form will be found on the News page of the website.

If you wish to discuss this appeal please contact Tam Hazan (details inside front cover).

That Sinking Feeling.

Turning to the back page of the Summer 2007 news sheet it took me a second or two to get my bearings on the artists impression of the Wappenshall Wide Hole until I realised that it was the view from the Newport side. I spotted the canoe just emerging from the 'drive through' warehouse and had a little smile as I can confirm that this will not be the first canoe to pass this way as my own was parked in the very same spot some 50 years ago when I was an adventurous 15 year old.

By that time I was an experienced mariner having twice gone round the circle at New Brighton fair in a tiny motorboat, battled the tide in the Barmouth estuary with 4 other schoolboys in a rowing boat, traversed the lake at Lytham in a heavy wooden canoe and crossed the Mersey on the ferry. Therefore the idea of paddling down the cut in a 12' canoe made from match sticks and canvas held no fear for me.

It was early Spring with a bit of weak sun but still quite chilly when Alan Dorricott and I arrived at the wide hole one Sunday afternoon, driven there by my father in his Moggie with the canoe perched on the roof rack. We had cushions and sandwiches and the idea was that we would spend 3 hours paddling up and down then he would return to collect us at tea time.

It was the maiden voyage for us and after a quick paddle round the wide hole to get used to the canoe we set off towards Eyton. It was technically only a one seater but as I was the captain I squeezed right up at the pointed end and left just enough room for Alan behind me. The voyage lasted all of three minutes then we both happened to lean to the right at the same time and the canoe just rolled over. Alan managed to leap out but I was wedged in so my head hit bottom before I could get out. The water was about 5' deep so I could stand up and salvage the sodden cushions but the sandwiches were drowned.

Shivering with cold we pulled the canoe under the arches of the warehouse and sat freezing for a couple of hours.

We survived and went back a few times and did a bit of exploring but having to rely on someone to ferry us there and back was a bit of a nuisance so the canoe was sold and I became a land lubber.

One thing that the new visitors will notice about this warehouse that will never change is the smell of agricultural chemicals as a result of Bates and Hunts using it as their store, very nostalgic.

Derek Gambie.

Dudley Tunnels Trip

Following a recommendation from one of our members, an enthusiastic party of 43 members embarked on a full day tour of the Dudley and Netherton Tunnels on 15th September. The journey began in beautiful sunshine as we cruised silently on the open, electrically powered “Electra”, through crystal-clear waters where every reed, every fish (and every tin can) could be clearly seen as we travelled silently along. Our skipper proved quite a wit, and gave a light hearted but informative commentary, striving to recapture the days when Dudley was the industrial powerhouse of the nation and really earned the name of “Black Country”. On this particular day, however, the grime and industry of the past felt very distant as so much of the route now seemed to have become something of a wildlife haven with abundant vegetation and animal life having colonised and camouflaged the old wharves and derelict industrial sites.

Then came the first of the two major tunnels, the 3027yd Netherton Tunnel, an exceptional achievement in its day with its double width channel, towpaths on either side and sturdy portals, all in excellent condition.

As we emerged back into the sunlight we were greeted with an impressive spectacle, as half of the Black Country seemed to have descended on the “Bumble Hole Conservation Area” for a day of pure nostalgia, with working narrowboats, traction engines, canal painting, endless stallholders all trying to catch your attention, plus a lively funfair for those with a strong stomach and a head for heights.

Eventually we managed to drag the party away from all the distractions to embark on Electra once again for the final leg of our journey. This was to take us through the 3,172yd Dudley tunnel which could not have been a greater contrast with the Netherton. Even the specially designed Electra only just about squeezed into the portal and hard hats had to be donned so that the unwary did not get caught from behind whilst closely examining the work of the tunnels creators that had laboured in the most appalling conditions all those years ago when it was built back in the 1780s. When we were deep into the tunnel the skipper gave the alarm as the whole tunnel was plunged into pitch darkness and it was announced there had been a power failure! It looked like we would have to negotiate the tunnel by hand or, to be more precise, by foot. Various teams of leggers were enlisted to rescue the situation and, for novices, they did remarkably well in the circumstances. However, there was some relief when the lights came back on again and the skipper proclaimed that the “crisis” was at an end and power had been restored.

Electra then took us through into the interconnecting tunnels and caverns for which the Dudley tunnel is best known. These are the earliest sections of the

tunnel system which were built to help with the transport of limestone extracted from the mines inside Castle Hill through which the tunnel runs. In here there were displays showing how the work was carried out during the working life of these mines and a very large screen audio-visual presentation. One of the caverns is now used for concerts and even weddings and certainly makes for an unusual and impressive venue.

So came the end of a very full and interesting day which was much enjoyed by all. If you missed out on the trip, and our experience has whetted your appetite for an excursion of your own to the Black Country then you might like to consider one of the shorter taster trips into either of the tunnels plus a visit to the Black Country Museum. You will find some relevant contact at www.dudleycanaltrust.org.uk (01384 236275) and www.bclm.co.uk (0121 520 8054).



About to enter Dudley Tunnel

Emerging from Netherton Tunnel



Legging in Dudley Tunnel

National Heritage Week-End, 6-9th September

In association with the annual national initiative to promote an interest in and understanding of the nation's heritage, SNCT were involved in two events in collaboration with Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council. The first was a talk by Trustee, Brian Nelson, when an audience of around 40 people were given an illustrated tour of the S&N plus an insight into our proposals for its restoration. This resulted in new memberships and some very useful contacts with like minded groups.

The second event, also led by Brian, was a walk along the route of the Shrewsbury canal from the old terminus at the Buttermarket through to Uppington. Over thirty folk joined the party on what proved to be a very pleasant walk on a beautiful day. Around half chose to take on the climb up Haughmond Hill for a picnic and chance to admire the views of the canal as it snakes its way towards Telford. Others took the gentler option of a pub lunch in Uffington before re-joining the party for the return to Shrewsbury.

Into the Heart of Shropshire

[This article, subtitled "An exploration of the Weed-infested Shropshire Arm of the S.U. Canal System" by T Wheeldon was published in "The Motor Boat & Yachting" issue dated September 29 1939. This must have been on of the last trips to reach Berwick Wharf from Norbury Junction.]

When early in July, my wife and I set out from Chester down the Shropshire Union Canal, it seemed generally accepted that we would devote our time to a run to Llangollen and back. Generally accepted, that is, by the various people with whom we had discussed the matter. Llangollen was the arm always favoured by pleasure craft, the main canal was "dirty and busy" and the other long arm was "impassable anyway".

It was this last remark which roused our interest, as on the map the branch to Shrewsbury looked inviting and worthy of exploration. Furthermore, no definite details were forthcoming as to why this particular waterway was impassable. The most general suggestion was that it was weeded up, but, as with Tomlinson, the knowledge was never first hand. In the absence, therefore, of anything definite against it, we decided to make Shrewsbury our objective, visiting Llangollen en route.

The boat was a new-type 18-ft 6in. cabin cruiser, drawing rather less than 2ft, and with a 6ft 3ins beam. A 2 h.p. Solo engine gave the maximum permissible speed of 3-4 knots without difficulty, and on about one-sixth of a gallon of petrol per hour. The cockpit was right forward, giving a clear view and making navigation

simple, a desirable arrangement in narrow waters, as proved time and again before the journey's end.

The first ten days we diverted for a run up to Llangollen and back. Besides being a most enjoyable wander, it enabled us to acquire some valuable experience in handling the boat, to polish up our lock technique and, by no means least, to glean information on the Shrewsbury arm. We found that the lengthmen varied from gross pessimism to cautious optimism whenever the subject was broached, and, on the whole, we learnt nothing definite.

One who had been that way recently thought we might get to Berwick Wharf, some five miles before Shrewsbury. On the other hand, Wilson's excellent "Inland Waterways of Great Britain" does not even mention the existence of the portion beyond Withington, much less consider it navigable. A coal barge, which runs down to Long Lane about every six weeks is apparently the only traffic other than a maintenance dredge.

Thus primed, we returned to the main canal at Hurleston Junction, and turned into the "unknown waters to the south".

From Hurleston to Norbury Junction is about 23 miles, and took, without hurry, one and a half days. We certainly did not find this main canal "dirty and busy". The water was muddy, it is true, and there was a certain amount of traffic, but this canal winds south through some beautiful scenery and is quite as attractive a waterway as part of that to Llangollen. Tyrley Locks and Tyrley Gorge, in particular, are worthy of mention. The two miles through Tyrley Gorge are very narrow, but, fortunately, we met no barges.

If there is any complaint about the main canal, it is that one has to especially careful in choosing one's night moorings, to avoid being hit or pushed away from the bank by passing motor barges. Whilst the vast majority of waterman fully uphold their reputation for courtesy by easing down, it is regretted that a few, always either girls or young lads, do ignore one's presence and cause one an anxious few moments as they sweep by.

At Norbury we turned west under a narrow bridge and the Shrewsbury arm lay before us. Immediately there is a flight of 17 locks to be negotiated, a portion of the 23 which drop the canal to below Newport.

Looking down this flight, every thing seemed in desolation. The surface of the water was lost beneath masses of weed and green slime, the ironwork of the gates was rusty, and the paint thereof had long since peeled off. It was apparent, however, that the weed down the centre of the basins was less dense than at the sides, and a passage was therefore feasible.

Followed some four hours of quite hard work! The lock gates groaned and

creaked, and from time to time paddles refused to budge. On the whole, however, everything worked, and that was all that really mattered. Once through the flight, we moored for the night. These two days had seen us through 49 locks, sufficient for any enthusiast!

The next morning we continued the three miles into Newport and stopped to shop. The Shropshire Union System is to be commended in this respect. I doubt there is another canal which passes so consistently through open country, and yet provides such adequate shopping facilities.

Whilst here the maintenance dredge came up the locks. This was the only boat we were destined to see until we returned to the main canal. The lengthman who came over to inspect our permit was quite the most optimistic we had yet met. Shrewsbury, in fact, seemed just around the corner.

The first two miles beyond Newport, to Edgmond, until we were clear of the locks, were really bad. A thick, grassy weed fills most of the canal, and is so covered by water lilies that it is difficult to find a way through. In the circumstances it is not surprising that we soon weeded up. The first time I cleared the screw I waded in to do so, but I soon learnt that it was better to wait for a bridge or deserted wharf where the stern could be brought close by and the screw reached comfortably by lying on the bank.

Once clear of the locks, the weeds were not so troublesome and we made good progress for over an hour to the imposing Humber Arm junction. At this point the two branches are so wide as to resemble a lake and, with the profusion of water lilies, reeds and stately trees make a perfect setting. The Humber arm is quite short. It was originally used to distribute coal from the Lilleshall mines. Now, of course, it is completely weed covered but no doubt a passage could be made to the farther end if desired.

Some little way on we came to the first of the two Eyton locks. These are the last on the system, and are noteworthy in that the lower gate of each is of the old fashioned guillotine type. The arrangement of wooden wheels and beams of which they consist is an indication of their great age, and we spent some time in studying these interesting old relics, possibly amongst the last of their kind. We also spent some time in trying to move them, and it needed all the efforts of a passing lengthman and myself to lift the first to its full height.

Between locks seems to be a bad stretch for weeds. This was no exception, and the mile to the lower gate was easily the worst yet. Clearing the screw had now become part of the routine, and did not take long. About this time too the lift bridges started getting troublesome. Normally, of course, they are quite easy to move but these, through constant farm usage, had become firmly bedded down, and the draw chains were either missing or thrown up over the beams. In the

latter event careful fiddling with the boat hook was required whilst the former required the application of much elbow grease to the bridge rails themselves. Up to this point we had covered some 10 miles in 4¼ hours, rather less than 2½ m.p.h. It was not exactly speeding, but fair enough in the circumstances.

The weed had now changed from grass to a furry moss, not so liable to clog the screw, provided one does not run into too thick a patch of it. Otherwise, the water was deep and we were able to make excellent progress to Long Lane. This is the terminus of the aforementioned coal barge, and beyond it we expected undisturbed water and plenty of weed. The first obstacle we met was a footbridge, composed of a couple of planks, thrown across from bank to bank. With a gallery of “locals” giving us moral support, we removed the obstacle and proceeded into the “wilds” beyond.

That night we moored just beyond Rodington, on a comparatively clear stretch. We had made good 14½ miles that day, and were only nine from Shrewsbury - so near - but yet so far.

The following morning we moved off at 10 o'clock. Soon, however, there came weeds in abundance, and clearing the screw proved a necessity at every bridge. Eventually it dawned on us that it would be much easier to tow through these bad patches. With the line secured to the canopy frame, about one third of the length from the bow, this proved highly successful. Thereafter I did much more towing than otherwise – much to the wife's amusement!

Thus to Withington which, as aforesaid, Wilson's book considers to be the navigable limit. We soon discovered he was not far wrong. From Withington conditions got steadily worse until at Berwick Wharf, some two and a half miles further on, we were brought up all standing by solid masses of green slime. The four miles covered that morning had taken 2½ hours and it looked as if we had come to the end of our forward progress. The immediate prospect was depressing and uninviting but, rather than give up without being quite sure, we moored the boat and went ahead on foot to reconnoitre.

The canal now ran into a shallow cutting preparatory to entering Berwick Tunnel. It seemed like the Valley of Desolation. The coping stones of a bridge had fallen into the water, and were covered with the same green slime. There was a sickly, nauseating smell arising from the stagnant waters and, over all, there was silence.

Thus we came to Berwick Tunnel. An inscription on the face read 1797 – one hundred and forty-two years old, in fact. We stood there a little while and tried to visualize the scene in those far off, busy days, 50 years before railways came to steal the traffic. Judging by the number of wharves and basins we had passed, this must have been a very busy arm in its hey-day.

We had noted the large layout at Newport, the Humber arm whence Lilleshall coal

passed for export, also the wharves and warehouses at Wappenshall and Berwick, the iron foundry just before Berwick, still known as the Forge. In addition to these there had been all the trade of Shrewsbury town and the agricultural requirements of the countryside.

The interesting thing about Berwick Tunnel is that it has no towpath, concrete evidence that the crews had to propel their craft by footwork on the tunnel roof, as we had often heard tell.

As weeds will not grow in darkness it appears quite navigable, although loose bricks under the several ventilating shafts might prove dangerous. Guided by these shafts we walked the half mile over the top to the other end. There is no definite path as would appear necessary for the horses to use. It would be interesting to know how they managed in this respect.

The far end of the tunnel presented an even more desolate appearance than the other, banks of reeds growing out of the slime and completely obstructing the waterway. There was thus no hope of taking the boat beyond Berwick. It was some consolation, however, to know that we had covered 19½ of the 24 miles from Newport to Shrewsbury. Only two of our many advisers had been optimistic enough to think this possible.

There has been great agitation in recent years in Shrewsbury to fill up the portion of the canal in the town and, no doubt, this will soon be done. From a hygienic point of view this is very desirable, but I cannot help shedding a silent tear at the passing of yet another of England's old waterways. No amount of optimism can, however, foresee any future for a branch such as this, with road traffic now so speedy and efficient.

The run back to Norbury Junction was accomplished without incident, although with much towing and weed clearing. Being a Sunday, we were, in fact, greatly assisted by numbers of willing helpers at the lift bridges and locks. Most of them were fishermen, and they seemed to come in their hundreds on this day.

Our total time on the arm was thus four days, including the half day at Newport. Chester to Norbury requires two days. For anyone who desires a peaceful and lazy holiday I should not recommend this route, but for those of us who go "ditch crawling" to work off that inherent sprit of exploration and the desire to get off the beaten track, I can think of none better.

The boat must draw less than 2 ft. A stout keel-bar, running right aft to the rudder, under the propeller, is essential, and the screw and cooling water inlet should be easily accessible for clearing.

Thus armed, there is no reason why the Shrewsbury arm, so far as Berwick Wharf, should not again be able to charm stout-hearted of our "ditch crawlers".

SHREWSBURY & NEWPORT CANALS TRUST

Membership Application

The annual membership fees are:	Individual Membership	£8.50
	Family Membership*	£10.00
	Life Membership	£100.00
(please circle category)	Youth Membership (under 18)	£3.50
	Group / Corporate Membership	£20.00

Supplement on all annual rates: for EU £2, for rest of the world: £4.

*Family membership is for people living at the same address: only one copy of newsletters and other material is sent per family membership. Only the person indicated as "applicant" below will be entitled to vote.

I/We wish to join the membership of Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust in the category indicated above. I/We also wish to make an additional donation of £_____. I/We enclose a payment of £_____ (cheques made payable to "Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust").

I/We hereby agree, if elected, to be bound by all the provisions of the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Trust (copies available on request).

I/We further agree to my/our membership details being recorded on computer, solely for the Trust's organisational purposes.

Signed:.....Date:.....

Gift Aid Declaration – please sign if you pay tax

I want all donations (includes membership subscriptions) I make from the date of this declaration to be treated as Gift Aid Donations (you must pay an amount of income tax or capital gains tax equal to the tax reclaimed on your donation(s)). I will inform you if I cease to pay tax.

Signed:.....Date:.....

Forename

Surname

DoB (if under 18)

Applicant:

Others:
(family
membership)

Address:
.....
..... (Postcode).....

Telephone number: E-mail:

Please post with your remittance to: The Membership Secretary,
The Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust, Brookfield, Wroxeter, Shrewsbury, Y5 6PH

Norbury 1959



This interesting photograph shows Norbury Top Lock (No. 1) in 1959 looking towards the Junction bridge. It was taken after the lock had been converted to a dry-dock but before the building, which now encloses it, was built. It was taken by Stuart Burton and kindly submitted by Brian Holmes.

Do you have any old photographs showing the canal? If so, Steve Bean would be delighted to receive them.