

To make canals navigable once more is trust's aim

WHEN we were kids, we were vaguely aware of a long-disused and mysterious old canal.

Its precise history would have been unknown to us, but we knew that it used to come into Shrewsbury through Ditherington.

Why? When? How? – We neither knew nor cared.

We also sort of knew that it used to terminate at The Buttermarket on Howard Street.

I'm also thinking that, back then in our childhood days (1960s, early 1970s) the section that ran into Castlefields alongside the Canal Tavern pub must have been sealed off from the public. Why else would we youngsters not have played along the old towpath?

And did I dream this or do I truly recall stagnant water and impenetrable overgrowth seen from Gas House Lane. (Well, Mum and Dad always used to refer to it as Gas House Lane – that bit of New Park Road leading into Castle Foregate.)

Anyway, I am indebted to Bernie Jones of the Shrewsbury and Newport Canals Trust for getting in touch recently to educate me on all of this.

Those fragmented memories of mine refer of course to the final stretch of the Shrewsbury and Newport Canal, and nowadays you can walk or cycle from Telford Way along the towpath out to Uffington, and you can stroll alongside the Canal Tavern in Castlefields. But what you now see is merely the ghost of a canal.

The trust is working to restore the canals from Norbury Junction (north-east of Newport) through to Shrewsbury, a project that

Shrewsbury Matters



With Phil Gillam

seems both exciting and hugely ambitious.

The Shrewsbury and Newport canals were officially abandoned by the 1944 Act of Parliament but they are now under active restoration.

The trust was formed in 2000 to return the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals back to navigation.

Very little of the line of the canals has been built on and no insuperable engineering problems lie in the way of restoration.

Aims of the trust are to protect, conserve and improve the route of the Shrewsbury and Newport canals for the benefit of the community and the environment, with the ultimate goal of restoring a continuous navigable waterway linking Norbury Junction to Shrewsbury.

We are talking about a route covering almost 25 miles and the whole project would cost a whopping £80 million.

Bernie says: "In the current economic climate the major impediment to restoring these significantly important canals, from a heritage perspective, is funding. We have had a feasibility study on the whole of the 24.75 mile length and there are no insurmountable problems that lie in the way. Just finding around £80m is the main challenge.

"The short term aims are to keep the project in the public eye and increase our 1400+ membership. This will enable us to leverage funding from various sources as



Volunteers carry out restoration work on the Sundorne section in Shrewsbury

there is such a large and growing number of people behind the project.

"I would urge people to visit our website www.sncanal.org.uk and take seven minutes to view the video 'Water Adds Value', as this shows that money put into canal restoration is an investment.

"The longer term involves working with numerous stakeholders and for our trust to be opportunistic by taking advantage

of funding packages that become available to do some restoration work via Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy agreements, or by other means. As more sections get put back into water, we will reach a 'tipping point' where all of them can be joined up and the canals will be navigable once more."

Visit the trust's website to find out more about the project.