



**Newsletter of The Friends of The Canal  
Museum, Stoke Bruerne**

# Chairman's Jottings

Lynda Payton

I'm writing my first jottings after taking over as Chair from Mick Butler, buoyed up by the knowledge that our dream of having a revamped, exciting and interactive Canal Museum, capable of meeting all the expectations of our visitors with modern facilities which will help it to survive and thrive into the future, is now more than just a small dot on the horizon that we are all straining to see. The dot is getting bigger and is coming more and more into focus each day. Exciting times and I'm proud to be at the helm to hopefully see it become a reality. We can but hope that the Trust's big and bold plans do not become diluted by funding constraints or thwarted by changes in regional management, and that the Heritage Lottery Fund and other stakeholders are kind to us and share our vision for a fully accessible exciting space which will still have the waterways collection as its core but will be more flexible and responsive and capable of interacting with and inspiring future generations. We will give the Trust all the support and encouragement we can and

eagerly await detailed project plans in the New Year.

Before I explain the detail and outline our commitment to the project, may I take the opportunity to explain how I came to be talking to you and to extend my and the Committee's grateful thanks to Mick for steering the Friends ably through the last three and a half years since David Blagrove, our Chairman and co-founder, sadly passed away. Sadly as this goes to press, we have learned that Jean, David's wife, has also passed away. Jean provided a huge amount of support to David and will be much missed. RIP Jean.



**Jean Blagrove who has died recently**  
(Photo: SB)

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**Cover picture:** A lovely summer's day in Stoke Bruerne (Photo: LSt)

This is not to say that Mick has stepped down from the Committee. Far from it. He has taken up the mantle of leading the Village at War Team once again, but he now has the time he needs to help support his family through for what is for them is a very difficult time. At the same time, a change in my own personal circumstances, with the death of my husband Sam, sees me with more time on my hands and able to step up to the plate. Sad times, but life goes on and I hope to be able to fill Mick's shoes as best I can.

So, what has been going on since your last issue of Museum Matters?

We now have a new Membership Secretary in the guise of Chris Durham who has a wealth of experience in these matters, coming to us as he does, from Lionhearts Cruising Club in Great Linford, north of Milton Keynes. I'm sure you will join me in extending a warm welcome to Chris.



**Chris Durham who has recently joined us as Membership Secretary**

Laura, who has retired as Membership Secretary, has kindly agreed to stay on for a limited time as Governance Officer and has taken on the mammoth task of updating and revising our constitution so it better reflects the way The Friends governance has evolved since we began back in 2006 and also incorporates up-to-date charity legislation and changes to GDPR; the General Data Protection Regulations. I am pleased to say the new constitution was adopted by members at the recent AGM and has now been submitted to the Charity Commission for approval. I won't go into detail. When it is approved, it will be available on our website for all to see along with our GDPR and Safeguarding policies. But, suffice to say, the main change is that instead of the two tier arrangement we had before with four Trustees and a Management Committee responsible for the day-to-day running of the Charity - all Committee Members are now Trustees with the added responsibilities that this brings.

So what else has been happening over the summer? I know Kathryn has included reports about *Sculptor* and *Village at War*, our members have been supporting elsewhere in *Museum Matters* so I will return to the future. Or, is it *Back to the Future*?

Before I do that though, I need to ask, is there anyone out there who could spare a few hours a month to attend our Trustee Meetings, take minutes and produce a typed (electronic) version for our records?

# Chairman's Jottings

Lynda Payton

We are desperately in need of help on this score. If you can, you don't have to join the Committee if you don't want to, and we would be very grateful indeed. Speak to, or contact any of us listed on the back page of this newsletter.

So, what does the Trust have in store for the Museum? Firstly and most importantly, Phil Mulligan, our East Midlands Regional Director has located some internal funding of just over £200k which needs to be committed or spent before the end of the financial year. No mean task and he has his work cut out to be able to achieve his aims. He tells us his priority is to carry out work to the Ground and First Floors of the Museum and the Learning Centre at the rear to facilitate the expansion of the Café into the current shop area, with the installation of a full commercial kitchen to be able to improve the catering offer; shrink the retail area and carry out physical improvements to the existing café; including enhancing the views of the canal with large picture windows; creation of an enhanced museum/café on the ground floor with some artefacts and displays moving from the upper floors. And hopefully, a solid fuel stove to create ambiance in the winter months. Yes – it's intended the Museum will be open throughout the winter, and even some evenings - and, better still, entrance will be free! On the first floor central space freed up by exhibits relocating to other floors, or offsite, will become a flexible space for an extension of the café, meeting space and for running events and activities. Other improvements are planned for the

Learning Centre as well, all with the aim of increasing profitability and sustainability.

Alongside the first phase, will be the development of a Stage 2 HLF bid for the funding of more elements which will hopefully see a lift, improved access to the Museum, new interpretation for the galleries and plans for the interpretation of buildings and structures along the canal corridor such as the Stables and Leggers Hut, Quarry Field and disused dry Top Lock as part of the creation of an 'Open Museum'. We and Stoke Bruerne Canal Partnership have asked for parking to be looked at, as the intention is to see all-year-round operation and hard standing car parking is in short supply in the village in winter when the fields are not available. This may, or may not, see the utilisation of space at the Bottom Lock and developments to enhance the connection of this area to the core of the village. Watch this space as they say.

At this stage there are no detailed plans available. Architects and Designers have been appointed and are working flat out on the concept design. We will know more in the New Year about what will be achievable. What is clear is there will be a Stage 1 and Stage 2 and in principle, subject to sight of detailed plans and satisfactory business model, we have committed funding of up to £62k to the Trust for the project with £12k earmarked to help support curatorial development. This allows us the possibility of awarding additional smaller match funding for the

HLF bid in Phase 2. We have ensured that we have enough funds in reserve to cover our commitments to work being carried out to *Sculptor*, to underwrite Village at War and to operate the Charity.

Which reminds me. Put the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> September 2020 in your diaries now! Stoke Bruerne is going to war again. Booking forms are already available on the website and more information will be added as time goes on.

So, everything is looking rosy and all that remains is to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and New Year. If you are boating, please take care, keep warm and be safe!

## Membership

My name is Chris Durham and I have been a member of The Friends for a goodly number of years although not an 'active' member so, when the call went out from Laura Sturrock for a volunteer to relieve her of the Membership Secretary post I thought it about time I did something positive for the Friends and here we are. So by way of introducing myself to you all here is - My Potted History;

My background is local having always lived in and around the Milton Keynes area and my family on my paternal grandmother's side hail from South Northamptonshire.

I like to think I have a broad range of skills and experiences, I spent the first half of my

working life in TSB Bank (the original, not the current reinvention) working my way from tea boy to the heady heights of a Marketing Manager within the bank's Electronic Banking team. Not being particularly happy with the bank's privatisation I downsized and moved to Bedfordshire County Council Social Services as a minibus driver/carer in a day-care centre and from there into the voluntary sector as Group Hire manager for a community transport charity. A further change in circumstances saw me move in another new direction and become a general hand in a motorcycle dealer, Mission Motorcycles in Fenny Stratford.

## MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

Joint members	£20
Joint members (over 60)	£15
Family membership	£20
Concessionary rate *	£10
Paper copy of Newsletter	£9

\* *Students and those over 60*

Remember - you can pay your subscription by way of BACS (the banks' internal payment process). The information you need is as follows:

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or send a cheque (payable to The Friends of The Canal Museum) to The Canal Museum, Bridge Road, Stoke Bruerne, Towcester, NN12 7SE.

# Membership

Chris Durham

This suited me very well for having been a keen motorcyclist since about 17 years old I was doing something I very much enjoyed and was being paid for it!

It did not last though, about two years on my other passion, boating, called to me and luckily my other half and wife Patricia (Pat) also having a love of boating saw us decide to rent our house out and live on a boat. But this also entailed me selling our Harley-Davidson motorcycle for which Pat has never truly forgiven me. We bought our 60ft Mike Heywood narrowboat *Tyro* and lived on it for almost ten years until family issues prompted us to move back onto the land and so we sold *Tyro* and bought our little 36ft Midland Canal Centre narrowboat *Goldie*. Interestingly since moving back onto the land we have probably undertaken more boating than when we lived on. This might have something to do with having joined both our local boat club Lionhearts Cruising Club in which I spent four years as Commodore and also IWA-MK branch in which I help look after our social media (Facebook) and where Pat and myself are volunteers as time permits in our Spring and Autumn Grand Canal Cleanups through Milton Keynes and our annual Lock Help Weekend fundraiser. Pat has also organised the adoption of Fenny Stratford Lock by IWA-MK. The cosmetics of the lock itself, grounds and swingbridge and the garden are all maintained by a small band

of IWA-MK volunteers organised by Pat of which I am part.

Currently I work in a pharmaceuticals warehouse assembling and preparing preparing orders of medicines for our NHS customers most of which are hospitals ranging from North Wales to the South and East of England and of course London. Being a gnat's whisker away from retirement I think I will probably see my (paid) working life out here unless the company knows otherwise.....

Hope to see you on and around the cut. Please do introduce yourself if you see us about on *Goldie*.

## Trust Update

The following is extracted from an email from Michelle Kozomara, of CRT, sent as part of a Museum Update:

From 6<sup>th</sup> January 2020, the responsibility for the two National Waterway Museums will move into the regions. The Museum in Gloucester will transfer to the Wales & South West region under Mark Evans, and the responsibility for the Museum Ellesmere Port will join the North West region under Daniel Greenhalgh.

Collections, under Graham Boxer, will remain a central function supporting all three museums.

The Friends of The Canal Museum at Stoke Bruerne (The Friends) may not agree with the opinions expressed in this newsletter, but encourages publication as a matter of interest. Nothing printed may be construed as policy or an official statement unless so stated. The Friends accept no liability for any matter, errors or omissions contained within this newsletter. We will however gladly publish corrections if notified. The Editor reserves the right to shorten or modify articles published in the interests of space or clarity.



*Sculptor* has had a pretty quiet time recently although the background work continues.

There's lots of changes, we understand, going on within the Museums area of CRT which is probably the main reason things have been quiet - an update is elsewhere in Museum Matters. Alex de Lile and John Solomons from Ellesmere Port were here for a few days to undertake some repairs to the cabin and to sand it back and put on the first coat of paint required for regaining.



**The underside of *Sculptor's* wooden bottom, paid for by The Friends, is in amazing condition. Photographed at Baxter's Boatyard (Photo: RW)**

We have, however, had a few outings. In October a company called Ricochet spent a day filming in Stoke Bruerne with Museum Manager Stephanie Furniss taking former GMB presenter Anne Diamond on *Sculptor* from the top lock to the winding hole and back again whilst Lorna York chatted to former BBC Royal reporter Jennie Bond in the hold of *Sculptor*. Later in the day Rob Westlake spoke with Pete Waterman about

Blisworth tunnel and even later in the day Kathryn spoke to Pete about the war time trainees. Bill Oddie was also in Stoke Bruerne; he spent most of his time with Owen Thomas at the blacksmith's forge. The resulting programme, 'Barging around Britain, Now and Then' is due to be aired on Channel 5 in January-2020.

Soon after the filming *Sculptor* was taken to Baxter's Boatyard at Yardley Gobion for blacking and inspection of the repaired driveshaft. *Sculptor's* wooden bottom was

also inspected and found to be in a very healthy state.

Not long after *Sculptor* was returned to Stoke Bruerne she was again off down to Yardley Gobion to help Canal & River Trust recover some stanking off boards which had gone missing during the recent flooding.

Lorna York has been in conversation with a previous Museum Manager, Tony Condor, and ascertained that the reason *Sculptor* is painted in austerity colours is because she saw wartime service in London although she would never have been formally in this colour scheme. This all adds to the history of *Sculptor*.



Sue and Jim Hutchison on *Hampton* with Alan and Cath Fincher at Village at War 2019 (Photo: LP)



A gentleman from the Royal Navy, Canal & River Trust Chief Executive Richard Parry and Mr Winston Churchill enjoying Village at War (Photo: LP)



**HMS Charlie preparing for an attack whilst passengers are enjoying a trip to the tunnel and back (Photo: LP)**



**Sid Norris, Montgomery and a gentleman from the Royal Navy enjoying Village at War 2019 (Photo: LP)**

# Village at War 2019

Paul Lynam



**Lola Lamour talking to visitors and this year's Village at War event** (Photo: LP)

The sun was shining for the 12<sup>th</sup> weekend of our annual Village at War event, with good numbers attending on both days and making a profit from the weekend of over £16,000 for our charity. Many other local organisations and charities had a good weekend too.

For a couple of reasons Mick Butler said that he wanted to step back slightly from the event management, and at one stage it looked like the event might not proceed. However some volunteers from the village came forward to offer their help and Kathryn Dodington volunteered to 'conduct the orchestra' of volunteers.

As is usual now, IWA Northampton volunteers turned out in good numbers on the 1<sup>st</sup> September to erect the large Marquee and other tents. IWA Northampton also ran a 'boat gathering' at Stoke Bruerne during the event and we were very happy to see a group of IWA members and other willing volunteers come along to lay the staging and help with the large number of other set up tasks on Friday morning.

Kathryn had also put out a call for CRT volunteers to help over the weekend and we were very grateful to see the band of willing volunteers who came to help with marshalling etc on Saturday and Sunday.

Mick was organising the entertainment still, and had moved things around a bit with the main music marquee into the field behind the Navigation, and a couple of other changes; this worked well, despite a no-show from one of our main acts.

As always, our usual performers of Lola Lamour and Paul Casper, aka George Formby, were very popular with the crowds as were all our other performers.

By the end of Sunday everybody was asking about the date for 2020. Lola said it had to be 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> September as that was the only weekend available in the 1940s Calendar so 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> September 2020 it is!

Lastly I must thank all the many volunteers, and CRT staff who made it such a memorable and profitable weekend. We could not do it without you.

Like the weather, trade has been mixed during 2019. Visitor numbers fell, 800 against the same period last year. This has impacted on car park revenue, contributed to less being spent in the gift shop and fewer visitors to the museum galleries. The better news, catering revenue is not far from where it was last year, demonstrating there is a healthy appetite with visitors to drink and eat out; it supports the direction for the exciting, proposed re-development, which The Friends is supporting.

Earlier this year I visited Venice and took the opportunity to visit The Museum of River Navigation, Battaglia Terme, twinned



**Louise and Stefania outside the Museum of River Navigation**  
(Photo: LSt)

with the Canal Museum, Stoke Bruerne back in 2011. David Henderson and Andrew Stumpf from the Trust initially visited in July 2012 when they met founder and curator Riccardo Cappelozza for the 'European Network of Historic

Canals and Waterways' conference. The focus of the discussions were to encourage serial designation of historic canals across Europe by UNESCO. There was also a series of programmed workshops on responsible, sustainable tourism along the European Waterways. Promoting the use of local food, the use of restored traditional buildings, mindful use of the environment

and local landscape for recreational purposes and how this can provide local job opportunities. Ideologies we continue to strive for. On my arrival Stefania Rocca was delighted to share with me the museum galleries, highlighting the area linked to Stoke Bruerne. This museum tells the fascinating stories of the people who worked alongside and on this ancient canal route to Venice. The artistic displays of boatbuilders tools and vessels was inspirational. However, it was the use of a historic building, in a pretty town, with a working waterway running through its centre and a small dedicated team, that seemed very familiar.

During 2019 The Canal & River Trust hugely improved facilities for visitors to the Canal Museum site, with newly refurbished public toilets. The museum was also pleased to retain its national 2019/20 Visit England accreditation for visitor destinations. It was great The Friends of The Canal Museum supported activities here for visitors throughout the summer. Village at War continues to be a hugely successful weekend, it raises funding for the museum and many village organisations.

The towpath from the bottom lock, up to the tunnel continues to look fresh and tidy all year round thanks to the Adoption Group.

You will see elsewhere information about some filming that was undertaken on *Sculptor* with a company called Ricochet, for Channel 5, which is due for screening in January-2020.

## Chairman

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Vacant

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## Other

Museum Manager (*ex-officio seat*)

## Curatorial Group

Steve Bagley (CRT), Louise Stockwin (CRT), Brian Collings, Rodney Hardwick, Brian Mayland, Lorna York, Lynda Payton, Olive Minney and Kathryn Dodington



## Photographic Credits

KD	Kathryn Dodington	FoCM
LSt	Louise Stockwin	CRT
SB	Sarah Borondy	
LP	Lynda Payton	FoCM
RW	Rob Westlake	FoCM



**A recently discovered image of the Rector's Bridge from a postcard dated 11<sup>th</sup> August 1906. It is understood the bridge was demolished in 1939, possibly as part of the war effort. Most of the foundations on the off-side remain to this day (Photo: via KD)**