



From the Chairman

It's been three months since our last newsletter. In that time we've been making news but have not found time to report on it to members.

I'd like to improve on that but as always it is down to volunteer capacity. The offer is still open for a member to compile this on a more regular basis.

Enjoy the read. Alan Stopher, Chair HCS

In this, the second edition:

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Marsden e-Shuttle - the new Huddersfield Canal Society Flagship

It started with a casual conversation at Tunnel End sometime at the back end of 2018. After numerous discussions, visits, investigations and a pandemic here we were at Droylsden Marina on Friday the 22 of April 2022, waiting for a low-loader to arrive from Brayzel Boats at Garstang with our shiny new boat. The crane had arrived, there were a number of excited onlookers, and some lucky people who were about to crew the Marsden e-Shuttle for the very first time. It wasn't the preferred location for delivery - we would have liked it to have been somewhere in Marsden or at least on the east side so we didn't have to go through the Tunnel. We really wanted to preserve the pristine appearance for the official launch, but suffice to say any other location was going to be too hard so Droylsden it was.

The low-loader backed up alongside the crane, and a couple of straps dangling from a hook were inserted beneath the hull. Carefully, the crane lifted our new boat off the back of the lorry, and swung it around over our heads (which were kept well out of the way), gently depositing it into the water.

Straps were removed, and all swarmed on board to take a look. General approval of the high standard of finish and excellent design features was forthcoming from those who hadn't seen it before. Some of us had already spent a day on board on the Lancaster Canal, admiring the sheer quality and standard of build. Andrew Crook, aka Brayzel Boat Builders, had really done us proud. *cont'd ...*



The HCS project team who had steered the project from start to finish were: (L to R) Terry Lomas, Eric Woulds and Mike McHugh. They all look satisfied with their work at the pre-delivery trial at Brayzel Boats.

A final quick reminder from Andrew about where all the knobs were and what they did, and at 11.00 Mike McHugh expertly steered our new flagship out of the Marina and on to the Ashton Canal. Just me and him for the first leg to Portland Basin. The rest of the crew who were there to assist with the passage to today's destination, the HCS Office at Wool Road, Dobcross, went by road to arrange vehicles so that transport home at the end of the day was sorted out. Time was now of the essence. We needed to be at Wool Road before sundown so that we could 're-fuel' for the final leg to Standedge Visitor Centre, planned for the following Monday. A 13 amp plug was now a requirement, not a can of red diesel. Range and battery capacity was also an unknown - all the calculations had been done but this was the longest journey the boat had done, and in fact is ever likely to.

About half way I took the tiller. The new experience of silent boating and the superb handling characteristics of the boat made time fly and before long the unforgiving stone wharf of Portland Basin appeared. I didn't want to be the first person to take paint off the hull so was extra careful in the approach and mooring. It was a brief stop - additional crew boarded, facilities quickly taken advantage of, and soon we were headed for Lock 1W.

The rest of the day passed superbly. The weather was excellent, there was plenty water in the canal, and everyone took a turn at handling. All were experienced Crew members so steering the boat wasn't a particularly new experience, but the e-Shuttle has some subtle differences to the original (now christened the d-Shuttle) that need getting used to. Good - it goes where you point it (those familiar with the d-Shuttle will know what I mean...)

Not so good, the stern deck is lower so you don't get the same view that you do with the d-Shuttle although this was specified so

that we can 'level load' at Tunnel End and Lock 42E, and also so we get through the Tunnel without major head and neck injuries. Brilliant - the Bow Thruster!

There were occasional minor incidents in locks and bridge holes, but it had to happen sooner or later and 'coping rash' was down to a very small amount. It was around 19.00 when we silently slid through Greenfield, and 20.00 when we moored her up outside the HCS office. To our relief (and a happy surprise) there was more than 60% left in the battery supply. Well over the minimum level to keep the batteries in good condition, and it bodes well for their long term life. The new yellow power cable snaked its way through the sliding door, having been plugged in to the control column to facilitate the recharge. Around 10 miles and 23 locks in 9 hours. Not bad.

Back again the following Monday.

Power supply was of course back to 100%, and we set off up the Diggle flight - just 9 locks and about a mile to go to the Tunnel Portal. Some new crew joined us so they had the pleasure of experiencing electric boating for the first time. Trevor Ellis, HCS Trustee and CRT official Tunnel Chaperone, was waiting for us and we readied the boat for the transit. Additional lights were taken on board, and I wrapped some old carpet around the vulnerable parts of the bow just in case (actually, not required). Can't say I recall the time we set off - I was probably too excited! I've been through the Tunnel several times on the d-Shuttle and although it's always a magical experience, the prospect of a silent passage was making this extra special. Sure enough, the next hour and a half passed by far too quickly. The new Tunnel light in particular was very impressive. We emerged into bright sunshine at Tunnel End with a small but select welcoming party to greet us. A truly momentous occasion. Pity we forgot the champagne.

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The Marsden e-Shuttle arrives at Tunnel End having been safely chaperoned by our Vice Chairman, Trevor Ellis, a stalwart volunteer for Canal & River Trust when it comes to Standedge Tunnel transits.



After the obligatory group photo, we took the new boat to the mooring outside the Visitor Centre to greet her elder sister. They look very happy together....

Job done!

Eric Woulds, Volunteer Skipper

Celebrating the 'coming of age' of the restored canal

May 1st 2022 marked 21 years exactly from the reopening of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal to through navigation in 2001. A select group of members and partners, together with representatives of the organisations involved in the final restoration push, gathered for an afternoon's reminiscing in the Thomas Bourne Room of the Standedge Tunnel & Visitor Centre. In all there were 32 present and the room reverberated to lively chatter between old acquaintances. There were former local authority officers from Tameside and Oldham, former Councillors from Kirklees and Rochdale, as well as a number of HCS stalwarts.

The Society's President, David Sumner, was unable to join us from Spain but made a generous donation which contributed to the cost of the buffet and cake.

Bev and Gary from CRT prepared the room and ran the bar despite a long day managing a wedding the day before. RachAl's Kitchen supplied the buffet. Rachel had been creative with the celebration cake incorporating a green hill and tunnel underneath.

David Sumner's personal 21st birthday message was delivered by the Chairman and Rose Dewey read out a message from her father Bob Dewey, one of the pioneers of the Society from the mid-1970s. It was a pleasure to meet Brian Beagley (member no 0038) and Derek Walker (member no 0022) who provided links with the early years.

Four display boards were set up with pictures of HCS Restoration construction work, celebrations over the years and construction during the Millennium Project. Ann Denham posted a series of clippings from 1st May 2001 when hers was the first boat through at Huddersfield that day and whilst she was still the Mayor of Kirklees.

Many took the opportunity to have a preview of the new Marsden e-Shuttle electric boat in advance of its public launch the following day. With so much talk of the Society's past successes, it was important to show that the Society is forward-looking and fully capable of embracing new technologies.

Alan Stopher

Well we couldn't not have a launch party. After all the proverbial trials and tribulations (including a global viral infection that had nearly brought the world to a full stop) it was imperative that we made a Big Thing of the arrival of our new trip boat. It was more than 30 years since the last launch party so only right we did it again, in a manner of speaking.

Of course many things have moved on since October 1991 when the original Shuttle (now christened the d-Shuttle) was launched by David Essex, who was famous at the time as the star of the BBC's series 'The River', where he played a lock keeper. He was of course famous for many other things including his success in the pop charts, and lots of people turned up to see him officiate at the launch. Whilst it would have been great to have had him back, we decided to look at the new world of social media for our guest as the whole concept of the e-Shuttle is looking forward. Robbie Cumming started a very successful YouTube channel around 5 years ago, documenting his life aboard his narrow boat 'Naughty Lass'. This progressed to a TV series on BBC 4 and his 'Canal Boat Diaries' has now had three seasons. HCS Boat Crew are all fans, and we thought there might be others who'd appreciate him being connected with the e-Shuttle so he was duly invited to carry out the honours. He enthusiastically replied and, subject to his filming commitments, he accepted the invitation. Our Canal and River Trust (CRT) colleagues at the Standedge Visitor Centre were also enthusiastic about a launch party, and complimentary events were organised to make the day special. Live music and a food stall were duly booked, and children's games were organised too.

HCS concentrated on getting the two boats ready for the big day, which had been set for the Bank Holiday Monday, 2 May.

The d-Shuttle was given a good clean and a bit of paint was touched up. A few Boat Crew took the e-Shuttle out for a few exploratory trips up and down the top pound to make sure our previous calculations on length and turning capabilities were accurate (they were - phew), and to make sure we were ready to show off the new boat to visitors and VIP guests. Julie Sharman, the CRT Chief Operating Officer had been invited and as she's responsible for the operational management and performance of the Trust's rivers and canals, including all aspects of customer services, volunteering and engagement, she was the ideal person to see what we're doing to support public interest and use of the canal and Visitor Centre (VC). Andy Widdowson, Head of Attractions Development at CRT was also going to be there so we had the big guns lined up! I'm also pretty certain they wanted to meet Robbie Cumming too!

The big day arrived. The weather was looking good, and by 12.00 a steady stream of people were making their way up from Marsden to the Visitor Centre. Bands were playing on the VC stage, the Cypriot Street Food stall was already doing good business, and the kids games were proving popular. The d-Shuttle was busy running between Lock 42 and Waters Edge café, and the e-Shuttle had been decorated with bunting and 'hidden' behind Bridge 62, ready for the launch to take place. I was milling around the site, having a final look before I was needed at the launch. I'd supplied the PA and was the only person who knew how to work it.... As I headed back to the boat, Beverley Earnshaw (who runs the function suite at the VC) called out as she'd just found Robbie Cumming who'd arrived at the site and was looking for someone from HCS. That'd be me then.



The crowds gather at Tunnel End in anticipation of celebrity Robbie Cummings officially launching the Marsden e-Shuttle.

After a quick greeting, we headed over to the e-Shuttle so I could introduce him to Alan Stopher (Chairman, HCS) and Mike McHugh (Boat Manager). It took quite a while, as people stopped us every few paces for a 'hello' and a selfie. It was obvious a lot of people there knew who he was and were looking forward to meeting him. No-one was turned down - he really is a lovely bloke! Robbie immediately recognised our Trevor Ellis, who has chaperoned many boats through Standedge Tunnel, including the Naughty Lass (see it on BBC iPlayer). We arrived at the e-Shuttle and Alan, Mike and Julie Sharman were all there, along with lots of people who wanted a chat! We were going to be lucky to get this done on time.....

The Boat Crew helpers were mustered - two were needed to hold the (appropriately) green ribbon across the canal at Bridge 62, and

then set off the confetti cannons. No expense spared. At 13.00 on the dot the e-Shuttle eased its way up to the ribbon, Robbie said a few words, and cut the ribbon with my kitchen scissors. The confetti cannons did their stuff, and the boat eased its way into the basin. The towpath and VC grounds were by now full of spectators - I can't remember any detail but I'm sure they were cheering (or if not, they should have been). Robbie went to chat with the VIPs on the open front deck, and we took the boat down to Lock 42. Lots of people on the towpath waving, and a few were still arriving too. It wasn't long before Robbie had the tiller and he soon got used to the handling. A few more turns around the canal basin, and then he went off with the VIPs presumably to get a well deserved pint.

We pulled the e-Shuttle into the VC wharf and welcomed our first public passengers on board. The word had got around pretty quickly, and there was a queue to get on.



Robbie cuts the ribbon and in a shower of confetti, officially launches the Marsden e-Shuttle before taking a trip past the Visitor Centre wharf (right).

The rest of the afternoon we spent blissfully doing what Boat Crew do, in the company of the d-Shuttle which was still doing good business moving people between the VC and Marsden. Around 17.00 the weather broke and it started drizzling. By that time most people had gone home, and it was the end of the day for Shuttling operations anyway. We packed both Shuttles up and headed home. Robbie was still partying - he'd volunteered to do a DJ set on the CRT stage and was in full flow.

Was it a success? Absolutely. We'd made a splash big enough for it to hit all the right media, including a quick spot on BBC Look North. It was just one day, but that's all you need to make people aware of what's happening.





Robbie Cummings entertains the VIPs on the open front deck of the e-Shuttle (from left to right: Alan Stopher (HCS), Victoria Levine (CRT), Andy Widdowson (CRT), Terry Lomas (HCS), Julie Sharman (CRT) and Mike McHugh (HCS).

deck makes for great photo opportunities - and as this is a major source of income for HCS we hope we can expand this side of the operation. We still have the d-Shuttle of course and subject to income we hope to continue to run two boats as long as it's economically viable. Having two boats also means we can still run a public service if the other is engaged in private charter work.

If you want to find out what's happening with the Shuttles, follow the Marsden Shuttle Facebook page. Lots of regularly updated news and information, and photos too!

Eric Woulds
Volunteer Skipper

A video of the event was commissioned, and after a bit of final editing it'll be available soon on the HCS website, the Marsden Shuttle Facebook page and YouTube. How many people came? Well, CRT were counting people through the gate to the VC. They stopped 'clicking' at 2500. They thought it might be less as there would be some double counting, but they didn't count the people who didn't go through the gate so it's possible there were more. We're saying 3000.....

This is of course just the beginning. Since the launch, almost all Volunteer Skippers have been trained in how to operate the e-Shuttle and it's now the 'default' boat for our regular L42 - Tunnel End operation. It's proving popular for wedding parties - the open front

Public 21st Celebrations

The Chairman writes: Thanks to Eric Woulds for his articles describing the arrival and launching of the Marsden e-Shuttle.

Whilst the e-Shuttle was the star of the show on 2nd May there were other attractions keeping the public entertained.

The Standedge Tunnel and Visitor Centre staff and volunteers have developed the grounds recently with a bandstand, picnic tables, raised beds and a pond for dipping and a wooden boat for climbing on. On the day, these were supplemented by traditional games including walk the plank and lassoing the bollard, all of which engaged the large number of young families. Many commented on the success of the child-friendly nature of the event and relaxed atmosphere. The Cypriot street food stall attracted a long queue and the Watersedge café and bar in the Thomas Bourne Room of the Warehouse building were busy all day. The latter had displays of photographs of restoration work and a

continuous loop of projected images created by Dave Calverley mainly from his archives, displayed Huddersfield Canal Society celebrations and boat launches over the last four decades. The Knot Guild brought their stall complete with equipment to demonstrate rope work techniques and many tried their hand at knots. Local school children had prepared their own take on roses and castles by displaying decorated pots.

A wide range of musical acts really brought life to the site and gave pleasure to many. It was great to have the Diggle Band back playing their signature piece 'Standedge' 21 years after they played when Prince Charles formally reopened the waterway in September 2001. The Diggle Band, (*pictured below by David Calverley*), have a long association with the Huddersfield Narrow having performed at staged openings over many years. Contrasting acts included classical, folk and salsa bands, a solo guitarist and finally the DJ set by Robbie Cumming to remind us that his first love is music.

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The waterborne activity is well described by Eric. To add my two-pennyworth it was clear that all were most impressed with the standard of workmanship on this unique craft, specified by the HCS boat team, formed from a steel hull built by Cauldon Boats and a splendid fit out by Brayzel Boats of Garstang. Fitted with a wheel chair-lift and a square counter this boat will enable those with physical disabilities an opportunity not possible on the original craft. I particularly want to pay tribute to Mike McHugh, the Society's Treasurer and Boat Officer who drove the new boat project from the outset and along with Terry Lomas and Eric Woulds worked long hours in ensuring the specification met the Canal Society's requirements and that the finished craft arrived on time and to budget. In doing this, Mike has set the course for the Society's future as a forward looking organisation embracing the kinds of change needed to maintain our members interest and promote the Huddersfield Narrow and the Society for years to come.

Robbie was the perfect choice to give the Canal Society's Marsden e-Shuttle its public launch. To quote him:

"As a single handed liveaboard boater, travelling along the Huddersfield Narrow canal is one of the greatest challenges you can face. Without the wonderful work that the Huddersfield Canal Society started decades ago I wouldn't be where I am today! I am in awe of the determination and grit of the members of this society, so to celebrate their achievements launching the new electric boat and putting on a DJ set was a huge honour"

In many ways this event was a re-launch of the Huddersfield Canal Society combining a celebration of the heroes of the past who brought this canal back to life and setting its course for the future with a new pollution-free vessel and a reinvigorated Standedge Tunnel & Visitor Centre providing pleasure and education for all ages.

Alan Stopher

Pennine Explorer curtailed

We had been planning a repeat of the 12 boats cruise run west to east in 2017. The Society's Keith Sykes had done a great job assembling 12 boats and crews for this year's event with a few in reserve in case of late vacancies. As the cruise drew nearer however two issues intervened to curtail it. Reduced reservoir levels and lack of spring rain on the Macclesfield and Peak Forest canals severely limited the lock passages at Bosley and Marple flights and their closure occurred on 21st June. Water supplies on the Huddersfield Narrow were limited but had stabilised by mid-June. However restrictions on the use of Diggle and Marsden flight locks to the summit remained, after their imposition on 9th May. On 30th May, Canal & River Trust warned that passages through the Standedge Tunnel would be limited in availability until August.

Against that background the 211 year-old canal presented us with a serious culvert leak in the pound between locks 20E and 21E. A review of the circumstances with 2 weeks before the planned cruise resulted in a notification from the Trust that it was highly unlikely that the leaking section could be repaired and a long stretch of pounds rewatered in time for the scheduled cruise to pass through.

The upshot was that a joint decision between the Society and CRT on 9th June determined that the complete cruise would not be possible and that a curtailed one would be consulted upon. This would ensure participants made the Standedge Tunnel passage but would then have to turn for return passages phased according to water and availability of chaperones and personnel to manage the locks. Understandably many of the booked crews had concerns about return journeys over the Pennines by any of the routes and

those based on the Macclesfield and Peak Forest canals wondered when they could retrace their steps given the indeterminate period of lock closure.

The change of plan resulted in 5 boats gathering for tunnel gauging and crew-briefing at Portland Basin on the afternoon of Saturday 25th June. The furthest travelling, Sapphire, from Thrupp on the Oxford Canal had been one of the last boats down the Marple flight before its closure. On the morning of Sunday 26th June, the boats were helped through the locks up to Stalybridge and moored and dressed up in time for the Stalybridge Festival that afternoon.

The Society's Peter Rawson declared nb Waters Edge the winner of the best-dressed boat, no doubt influenced by splendid pot plants as well as the bunting. The Stalybridge Buffet Bar's pie peas and mash provided plenty of wholesome food for crews to soak up the odd drink on their first evening together.

Moira Wilson steers the d-Shuttle passed the decked out Pennine Explorer boats at Stalybridge
Photo: Alan Stopher

The Christies with their trophy for the best-dressed boat (nb Waters Edge) Photo: Peter Rawson



The week's only wet spell coincided with the run up to Roaches but at least crews had the afternoon to dry out in the sun or explore Mossley. The cruise up to Uppermill the following day proved uneventful and gave everyone the chance to do Bob Gough's Treasure Hunt quiz exploring the village. The need for careful water management by CRT meant a somewhat halting cruise up the last 11 locks to Diggle summit on Wednesday 29th June. Those in the lead had more than enough time to partake of ice creams or cream teas at Grandpa Greens. In the evening Keith Sykes entertained the gathering with a quiz at the Diggle Hotel.



Pennine Explorer boats at Roaches, Mossley (above) and Uppermill (below) and left: three of the CRT volunteer lock-keepers who helped the boat crews. Photos: Alan Stopher



Thursday 30th June was the day all 5 boats and crews passed through the Standedge Tunnel. Three different chaperones including our own Trevor Ellis guided everyone safely through with the minimum of lost paint. The gathering of 5 boats in mid-afternoon at Tunnel End Marsden was certainly a spectacle as was the turning of 4 of them to face the right way for their planned return. The Treasure Chest for the Uppermill quiz (hand crafted by Bob Gough) was awarded to the crew of Sapphire and Standedge Tunnel plaques were given out to each boat in recognition of their passage through the longest, highest and deepest UK canal tunnel.

A video of the Standedge Tunnel made by David Johns, is at:
<https://youtube/9ETwZuu9yZ0>

*Right: The Ashdowns receive their treasure.
Below: A gathering of the Pennine Explorer boats at Tunnel End. Photos: Alan Stopher*



The Waters Edge café reopened specially for the crews and volunteers to take on board some sustenance and CRT's Luke sold bottles of drink from the mobile ice cream stall. The Chairman showed the Impossible Dream DVD and afterwards gave a résumé of the changes since the reopening. Afterwards Keith Sykes conducted a walking tour to show our guests some features of Marsden's history.

The cruise had come to a premature end but all crews agreed that they were really pleased that they and the Society had persevered to run the event.

Thanks go to the boat crews, staff and volunteers at the Canal & River Trust and HCS volunteers for making the event successful. When will it run again was the question posed by many? There were times when it was apparent that had there been 12 boats the challenges would have been immense. 5 or 6 boats seems a more manageable number although it makes running special evening events less viable. Food for future thought.

The absence of rain this summer has put a great strain on all the northern waterways

that are reservoir-fed. CRT management were committed from the outset to support the cruise in its entirety but circumstances conspired against them, resulting in a drastic reduction in the number of tunnel passages available to casual boaters. This could not have been predicted in December 2021 when the event was first planned but it gives pause for thought for the future.

Post-script: By the time the cruise had reached the summit it was apparent that the temporary repair to the culvert between locks 21E and 20E was holding sufficiently for the canal through Slaithwaite to be reopened, albeit with passage made carefully with no propeller turning at the crucial point.

One boat, Waters Edge, crewed by Rob and Nicky Christie, took up the challenge and headed down to Huddersfield and were last heard of in York. This intrepid crew had managed to make all three Pennine canal crossings in a year when many struggled to complete one!

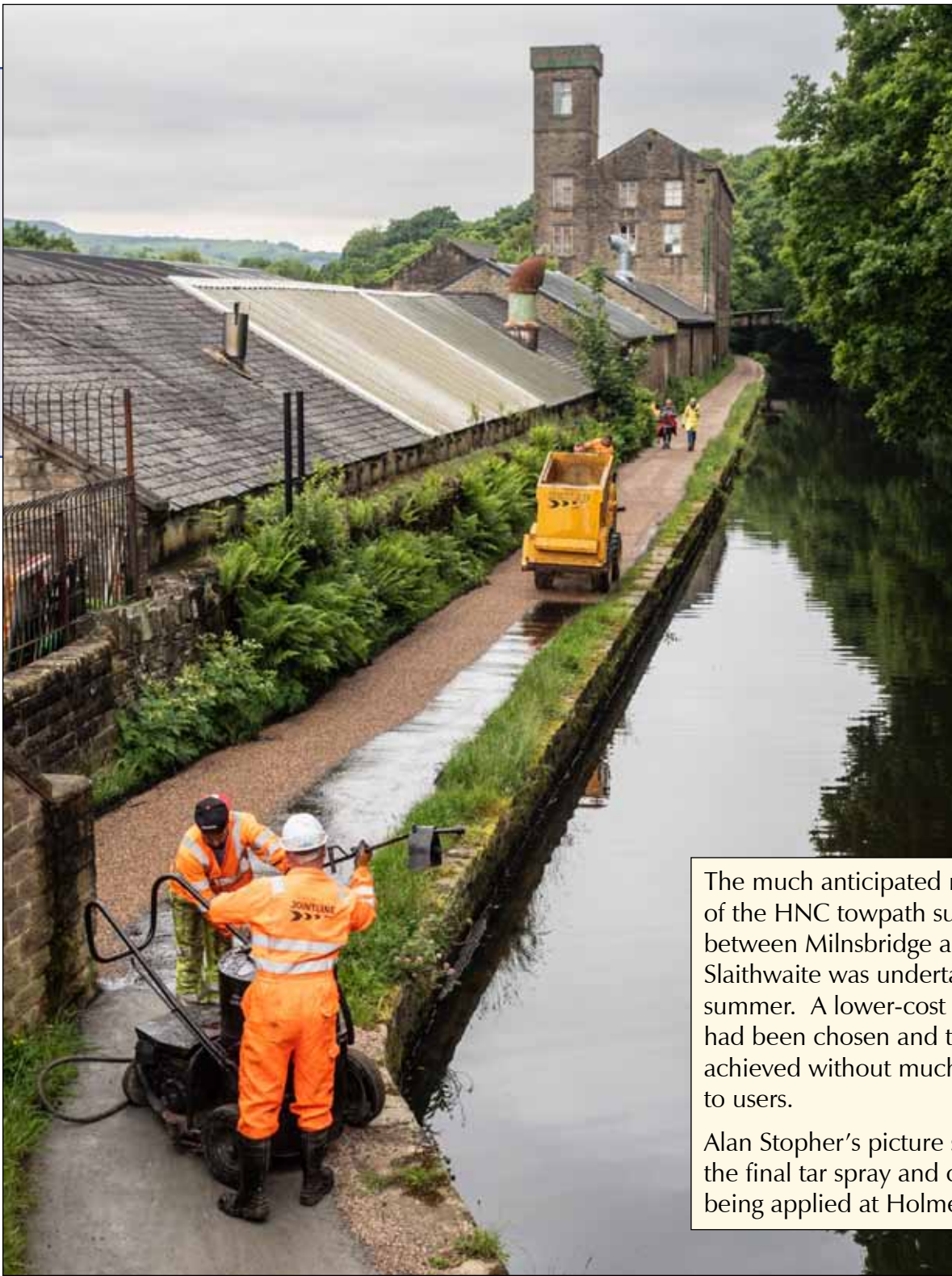
Alan Stopher



*Above: Busy moment outside the Visitor Centre, Tunnel End.
Left: nb Kelpie turning to go back.
Photos: Alan Stopher*



Towpath Upgraded



The much anticipated renewing of the HNC towpath surface between Milnsbridge and Slaithwaite was undertaken this summer. A lower-cost surface had been chosen and the job was achieved without much disruption to users.

Alan Stopher's picture shows the final tar spray and chip finish being applied at Holme Mill.

Praying for rain in the Pennines

I'm writing this on 21st July and we've just had some rain for the first time in weeks. It is just enough to wet the lawn but will not even start to refill Pennine reservoirs. It was 39°C in Huddersfield two days ago and what is forefront in my mind is how canals can be made operable in a future of water shortages and extreme weather.

A week ago it was announced that the HNC would be closing to all traffic on 1st August. Those who had patiently awaited a Tunnel passage will have to re-book when conditions improve. Similar shortages affect the Rochdale Canal and the Leeds & Liverpool, already with restricted lock times, has closed above Bingley Five-rise with a culvert failure on the lengthy pound.

Alan Stopher