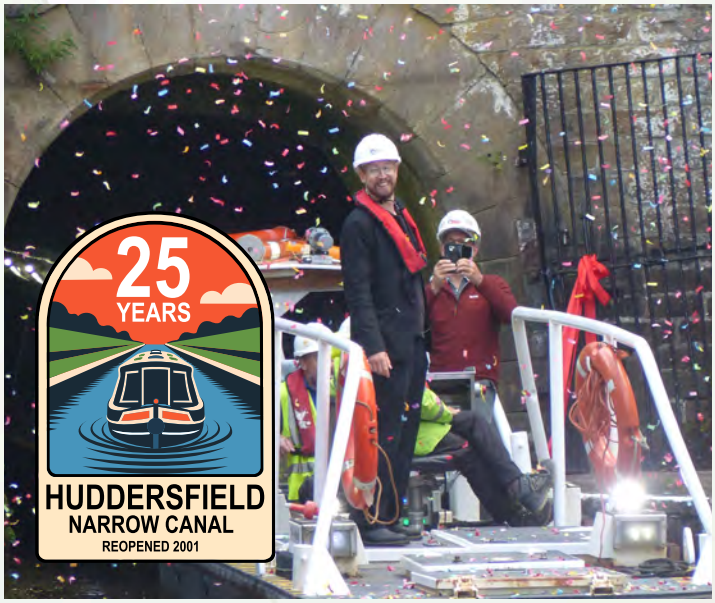
NOVEMBER 2026

Pennine Link

Huddersfield Canal Society Newsletter



25th Anniversary of reopening

It has been a busy year for the Huddersfield Canal Society and its partners as we have celebrated 25 years since the reopening of the Huddersfield Narrow Canal to through navigation. Many thousands visited the main event and a number of smaller events brought different spectacles to the waterway. None of this would have been possible without the enthusiasm and dedication of our own active members, the Friends of Standedge, the Hanson family at NECMA and Canal & River Trust staff and volunteers.

The year has had its frustrations too as the canal has been closed to through navigation for much of the cruising season. A mixture of drought and essential work on canal reservoirs has meant that the east side downstream of Slaithwaite has had little or no feed of water. I look forward to completion of the major work at Hilltop Reservoir over the winter period and a better year for navigation in 2027.

A note from our chairman

Welcome to this newsletter which has taken a long time to emerge and is therefore quite a lengthy one. Regular news is posted on our website https://huddersfieldcanal.com/ so perhaps I ought to rename this missive as Pennine Link roundup.

In this edition we report on:

- Waterways and the drought
- . Reservoir work
- . 25th Anniversary celebrations:
  Morris Minors, Community Spirit visit, Russel Newberry gathering, 1st/2nd August event, Wilderness Boat Club gathering, John Warburton's art
- . Our boats operations
- . Sale of our office
- . 220 Club
- . In memoriam – Keith Gibson

I'm grateful to Nik Lever for setting the words and pictures into a readable format for publishing.

Enjoy the read.

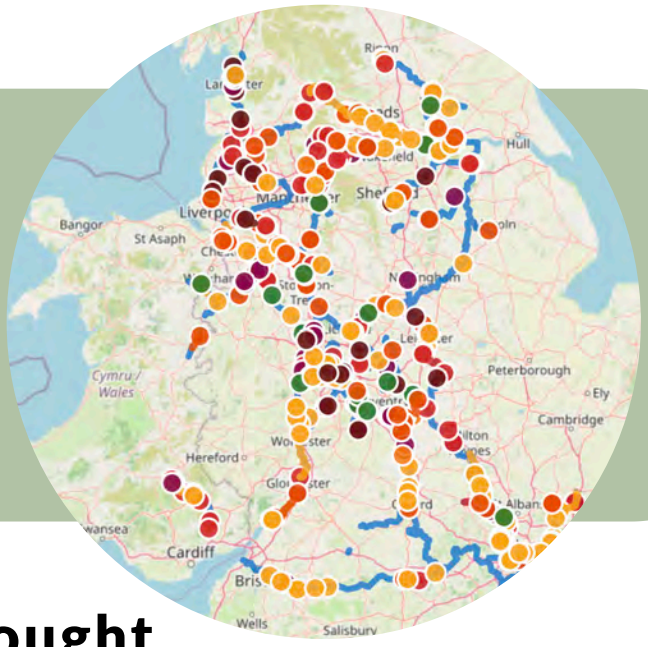
I hope you enjoy the read.

Thank you,

Alan Stopher







Waterways and the drought

2026 has turned out to be another very dry summer season following droughts in 2022 and 2025.

This is clearly a pattern of what is to come coupled with intense rain storms and high winds bringing damaging conditions to 200 year old structures and an ever increasing number of tree falls. Each major event causes a headache to the navigation authority as they have to seek access before repair works start..

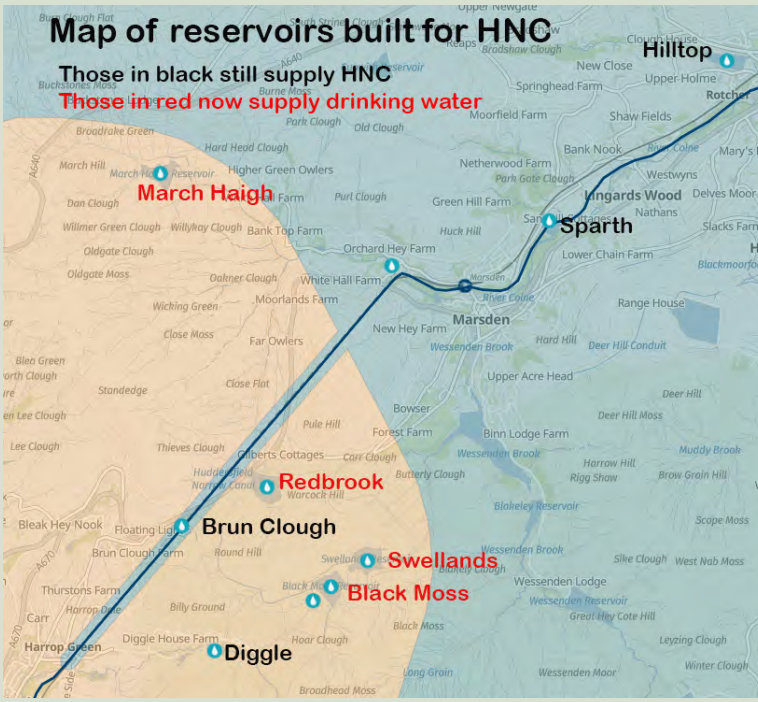
Our September 2025 newsletter included a Canal & River Trust (CRT) map showing the extend of waterway closures which had started in the north and spread to the Midlands.

This year CRT has once again published maps showing closures and restrictions which have affected the south of the network as well.

Reservoir Work

Deputy Chairman, Trevor Ellis and I were shown around a number of CRT maintained reservoirs in March 2026 at a time when repairs to Sparth reservoir at the bottom of the Marsden flight had been completed, other inspections and works were being planned and the major reconstruction at Hilltop Slaithwaite was half way through a 2 year programme.

The following background to HNC water supply may be a good reminder to our members. Many of the original HNC reservoirs no longer feed directly to the canal. The Scammonden agreement of 1972 between Huddersfield Corporation and British Waterways (BW) resulted in Black Moss, Swellands, Redbrook and March Haigh being used for drinking water with compensation water being supplied to the canal above lock 42E at Marsden for feeding mills downstream. This was at a time when restoration of the canal was inconceivable.



The same agreement resulted in BW and their successors being responsible for maintenance of the dams despite their water going to what is now Yorkshire Water.
Sparth, Slaithwaite, Diggle and Brun Clough continue to feed the canal and are also maintained by CRT.
The map on page one shows the location of each of the reservoirs in relation to the canal and Standedge Tunnel. Two that are not labelled; Tunnel End and Little Black Moss no longer act as reservoirs.
From this you can see that CRT has a considerable liability. As with all reservoirs, changes in legislation following the Toddbrook partial failure in Whaley Bridge have increased the liabilities and costs of maintenance. All HNC dams are designated as Category A reservoirs (where a breach could endanger lives in a community). For these large raised reservoirs, the design flood is the 1 in 10,000 year event, or a storm with an annual probability of 0.01%.
We were taken up to March Haigh (top photos) to see the work which had recently been completed. Two photographs show the new valve in the tunnel within the downstream face and a view along the upstream side of the dam with the water drained and the earliest constructed dam visible well below normal water level. As I write this the reservoir has pretty much refilled.
We were advised that an independent





inspection of Redbrook and Brun Clough reservoirs under Section 10 of the Reservoirs Act would take place in April 2026. This would determine what work needed to be planned.
Our visit to Diggle (photos below) was most interesting as it is out of sight up a narrow valley with limited access. Entry to the dam is through one of the many shooting club galleries in this area so CRT staff have to notify the club prior to visiting.
Unlike the other dams which impound water in a valley, Diggle is a Non-Impounding Dam as it is constructed to the side of the watercourse and water is deliberately drawn off the Diggle Brook when it is needed. It is thus L shaped and formed to the side of the valley. The original dam was much lower and was an impounding dam. Diggle will receive an inspection under Section 10 of the Reservoirs Act in 2027. Two views show the reservoir from the corner of the L shape and Diggle Brook with the return spillway from the reservoir.
On a very blustery day we did not spend long on the exposed western dam of Black Moss reservoir.
Swellands reservoir, drawn down for safety reasons since 2023, is situated to the east and downstream of Black Moss. In order to make repairs CRT had obtained permission from landowners including the National Trust to build a stone road and a partially constructed board access road which reached the north west corner of the reservoir. However it has since not been possible to complete the road in accordance with the planning conditions owing to the likely adverse impact on the peatland habitat. Thus the major repair work to the dam has not been possible and CRT now propose to decommission the reservoir. Their planning application for the necessary work had been imminent at the time of our visit. On the visit we were assured that the resulting reduction in reservoir water available to Yorkshire Water would not affect the volume of compensation water available to CRT at Marsden for the Huddersfield Narrow Canal.





Our final visit was to Hilltop reservoir at Slaithwaite. The task in hand is to modernise the spillway which involves building a new concrete channel above the existing deep tumbling bay which is enclosed in a tunnel. Work will continue throughout 2026 with the aim of completion in January 2027.

The photograph from the footpath along the crest of the dam shows the considerable drop to the bottom of the slope. The main construction this year involves forming a new spillway behind the hedge to the left. At the time of our visit the new valve had been opened to allow some water to re-enter the Merrydale Beck well below the dam work but very little water was being sent to the canal. Reconstruction of the former mill on Bank Gate (the left of the picture) and associated retaining wall work was presenting a challenge to the adjacent CRT works.



25th anniversary events

A number of special events coincided with or were arranged specifically to take place to celebrate 25 years of the reopened Huddersfield Narrow Canal.

Morris Minors

In April HCS Trustee, Keith Sykes arranged for the North of England Centre for Music and Arts (NECMA) to host a rally of Morris Minors including his own.

Community Spirit

We were pleased to be joined by Community Spirit with its crew members from the East Manchester Community Boat Project on 31st May 2026. Their boat which is based at Portland Basin runs canal trips for canal for those who may be disabled or disadvantaged, had been converted to electric propulsion. It was good to get together for a social and share experiences of running electric boats. Pictured here is the gathering at NECMA and the e-Shuttle passing Community Spirit as it is charged for the return journey.



Russell Newbery gathering

The Russell Newbery Register, a club for those who own narrow boats with the historic engines built by the RN company, organised a boat gathering in Stalybridge in late June. Despite planning for the event many months before, failure of a lock wall on the Marple flight meant that all of the craft were held up on the Macclesfield and Upper Peak Forest canals so could not cruise to the HNC. Nevertheless, the weekend conference went ahead at St Peters Church Hall as a number of speakers had been arranged. I was pleased to be able to show the Impossible Dream film from 2001 and brief the assembled boat enthusiasts on what has happened since then.
Illustrated here is a Russell Newbery gathering at Stourbridge to show what Stalybridge missed.





Treading the Towpath

Canal Society John Warburton had spent much of the previous year walking the HNC, sketch pad in hand, recording every lock. His exhibition in the Colne Valley Museum during August and September 2026 displayed over 30 of his watercolours one of which is depicted here. Further exhibitions are planned and he still has more towpath the tread.

25th Anniversary celebration 1st/2nd August 2026

Months of planning went into the grand event which took place over a whole weekend during the summer holidays. HCS worked closely with Friends of Standedge, North of England Centre for Music and Arts and the Canal & River Trust to ensure that there was plenty to interest visitors of all ages on the combined site at Tunnel End Marsden.
A highlight of the day was the attendance of canal boat celebrity Robbie Cumming, famous as the presenter of Canal Boat Diaries. Robbie steered the electric boat and took the CRT boat into the tunnel. At the end of the tunnel trip, he cut the ribbon to echo Prince now King Charles doing the same thing 25 years previously. In the evening Robbie entertained a packed house at the NECMA.

There were food stalls, various environmental groups were represented, a variety of music on offer at NECMA and the Watersedge cafe, circus skills, games and play activities, a rope making display and you could even try your hand at axe throwing. The e-shuttle was much in demand and the tunnel trip was fully booked both days.
To get a flavour of some of the activities please look at this link on the HCS website:
https://huddersfieldcanal.com/25th-anniversary-of-the-reopening-of-the-huddersfield-narrow-canal-is-a-great-success member/



HUDDERSFIELD NARROW CANAL REOPENED 2001

Wilderness Boat Owners Club gathering

11th – 16th September 2026







We were pleased to welcome these intrepid boaters to the Huddersfield Narrow. HCS Trustee was our main organiser and he writes here:

An appeal through Northen Canals Association for possible venues for the Wilderness Boat Owners' Club to have a bi-annual cruise, led to the Huddersfield Canal Society suggesting the Huddersfield Narrow Canal as one of its events to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the canal's re-opening.
In Spring of 2026 one Yorkshire member with his trailer tested the canal's slipway at the foot of the Diggle flight, which had not been used for 25 years and arrange trailer parking at a nearby caravan site.

In September eight club boats used the slipway to launch and spend the first night at Uppermill with a film show and talk by our chairman at the Civic Hall on the "Restoration".

The next day found the boats going west to Roaches for a lunch at the canalside hostelry. Sunday, with the assistance of CRT volunteer lock-keepers, was the ascent of the Diggle flight to the summit, at 645 feet above sea level the highest canal in Britain, followed by another talk on the Standedge Tunnels by Trevor Ellis.
Monday was the highlight with a complete transit of the longest and deepest canal tunnel in Britain – the "Everest of Canals" – in CRT's 20 seater tunnel trip boat with commentary all the way. A return was made on the top deck of a double decker bus from where the top of many tunnel shafts were pointed out.
The last day, Tuesday saw the descent of the Diggle flight to the recovery of the boats up the slipway and home to find yet another adventure on their 23 foot trailboats.

Keith W Sykes

220 Club

We're grateful to our members who have provided financial support through holding shares in our 220 Club.

This was an important fundraiser when our expenditure exceed income and we had staff to organise the draws. In recent years the number of participants has diminished and the Board Trustees have recently taken the view that the amount of work needed to run the club is out proportion to the benefit it brings. It has therefore been decided to close the club at the end of our Financial Year on 31st December 2026. All participants have been notified in writing.



Our Boats





HCS boat crews have been busy running our two craft over weekends and school holidays at Uppermill (Little Blue Boat) and Marsden (e-Shuttle).
The boats have been dressed up for special events too, the most recent being Halloween.

We've trained up some new crew members but could do with more volunteers so that we can run on more days.
If you'd like to join the rota, please email boating@huddersfieldcanal.org.uk
There are many pictures of the boats in action at: https://huddersfieldcanal.com/boats/

In memoriam – Keith Gibson

We were saddened to learn of the passing of pioneering HCS member Keith Gibson on 9th October 2026. Our condolences go to Kath and the family. An appreciation will appear in the next newsletter.



Sale of our office

Members will be aware that we were putting up the Transhipment Warehouse for sale by auction last October.

We were pleased to get a good final offer as the hammer dropped and, after some last minute clearing out of items worthy of retention, eventually completed on the sale in January 2026.

The strengthening of our funds has meant that we can consider supporting some larger projects which would benefit the Huddersfield Canals. We have been in discussion with Canal & River Trust and the Friends of Standedge over helping to fund a replacement tunnel trip boat as the current vessel is nearing the end of its working life.

Watch out for more news.

