CANALNEWS

Spring 2025 £1.50 / FREE to Members ISSUE 186



Bugs and Bees and Butterflies. Oh my!

Just One Drop The Story of the Canal's Water Supply - Part 2

Photo: Malcolm Gillies

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT



This year started with a trip to Atlas Winch and Hoist Services Ltd, Biggar, to give our slipway winch its annual service. This time without incident. This was soon followed by a service for the winch tractor thanks to Adrian McCourt.

We were all saddened, however, by the passing away of two valued members, Brian Elder and Chris Cassidy. Brian was a regular crew member on the boats before his illness. Chris, a relatively new member. had a wealth of knowledge in electrical wiring. Both are sadly missed. Rest in peace dear friends.

Mary Carnie, a superb member of the board, had to leave us due to health reasons and we wish her well.

As winter turned to spring, a major clear out and tidy up of the boats and storage area was carried out with an attempt to get equipment and parts, etc in the correct places. It is now possible to find things when they are needed. Good job everybody.

The Falkirk Wheel trip boats became unusable for a while, but FFCS stepped in to hire out our Voyager to run trips at the Wheel. This meant we were without our big boat for a couple of months. On the plus side, however, we should get a substantial income from this venture. Voyager is now returned to us and once Gipsy Princess and Maryhill cleaning and painting are complete after the winter, we will be able to get Voyager fully functional again too.

I am delighted to congratulate Paula Braceland, our secretary, on passing

her exams to qualify her as a Helmsman (excuse the gender reference as I am not sure what else to call it). Also, congratulations to our Vice Chairman, Scott Castell, who qualified as a helmsman instructor, so we will now be able to officially train our own members to qualify and, of course, will be able to run courses for other canal users. This will save the society money and bring in some income too. A win-win if ever.

James Pert (aka Jim)

Paper or digital? You choose...

Just a quick note to remind members that unless you request a paper copy of Canal News, you'll be emailed a digital copy going forward. If you'd prefer a paper copy, they'll still be available, just email membership@forthandclyde.org.uk and let them know you'd prefer a good old fashioned paper copy.

Editor's Note

Welcome to Canal News. This month we have part two of 'Just One Drop'. Explaining where all that water in the canal comes from. We have an excellent article on bugs, bees and butterflies (and damsel flies), the usual Splashback, and a few short pieces. I have to give special thanks to ***Paul Carter*** for writing most of this issue, and to ***Malcolm Gillies*** for the lovely photos.

If you have an article about anything related to the Forth & Clyde canal, please email it over and I'll do my best to use it.

All the best
Ronnie
ronnietucker@gmail.com

CANAL NEWS CONTENTS


News - p04


Features - p08


Splashback -p17


Society - p20


About Us - p24

NEWS IN BRIEF



Lock 16 Bypass and Gate Replacement

Scottish Canals is embarking on the first step in a major programme to upgrade the locks along the Falkirk Flight of the Forth and Clyde Canal. Lock 16 is one of 11 locks that will undergo gate replacement, refurbishment, and upgrade over the course of 2025 and early 2026.

Scope of work at Lock 16

Our contractor Mackenzie Construction Ltd is installing a lock bypass, which will allow for better control over the canal's water levels. It will also reduce the need for diesel-fuelled over-pumping, minimising the canal's carbon footprint and simplifying future maintenance. Once the bypass is completed in July 2025, work will begin to replace the upstream and downstream gates (with a target installation date of September 2025).

Why are the works needed?

It is almost 25 years since the Millennium Link Project re-opened Scotland's Lowland canal network, turning derelict waterways into thriving spaces for nature and people.

Oak gates, like those installed during the Project, last an average of 25 years in the water. That's because they are subject to immense pressure from thousands of cubic litres of water, weather and erosion, as well as wear and tear from regular use.

Throughout 2025 and early 2026, we will replace a total of 10 lock gates along the canal in addition to the bypass at lock 16.

March Update: Fish rescue

Today, we started lowering the water levels between locks 16 and 15 as part of the bypass works. Forth Rivers Trust are leading the rescue of fish and relocating them to other parts of the canal.

Duration: January to September 2025

Source: Scottish Canals



NEWS IN BRIEF



Falkirk Wheel receives Gold Green Tourism Awardl

Scottish Canals is proud to announce that The Falkirk Wheel has been awarded the prestigious Gold Green Tourism Award, highlighting its unwavering commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship.

The Falkirk Wheel, a marvel of modern engineering and a popular visitor attraction, has been independently assessed against rigorous sustainable certification standards. Achieving this gold status is a testament to the dedication of The Falkirk Wheel team in promoting eco-friendly practices and protecting the natural environment of its surroundings.

After six years, a pandemic, and major repair works since the last assessment, the reassessment in March has confirmed The Falkirk Wheel's continued commitment to sustainability. As the heart of the community, The Falkirk Wheel is proud to promote the sustainable efforts that often go unnoticed.

Visitors to The Falkirk Wheel can enjoy a range of eco-friendly activities, including paddle pick-ups where local schools and youth groups join in keeping the canals clean while getting some exercise. Collaboration with volunteer groups helps maintain cleanliness on land through litter picking and contributes to area regeneration with tree planting and rewilding. These initiatives have earned The Falkirk Wheel the status of a Keep Scotland Beautiful hub and a 100% score in community engagement.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Leading Scottish civil engineering contractor launches community fund

As work begins on the most significant upgrade to the Forth & Clyde Canal in over two decades, Mackenzie Construction is launching a dedicated community fund to support local groups, organisations and initiatives in the Falkirk area.

The essential works form part of Scottish Canals' major investment programme to safeguard the historic Falkirk Flight of the canal. With over £3.5 million being invested in the replacement of ten lock gates and associated maintenance between 2025 and early 2026, this critical project ensures the canal remains open, safe and navigable for the next 25 years and beyond.

As part of their ongoing commitment to the communities in which they operate, principal contractor Mackenzie Construction has announced the creation of the Falkirk Flight Community Fund. The initiative is designed to give something back to the communities surrounding the canal —particularly those living close to the works between Lock 3 and Lock 16, including the districts of Camelon and Tamfourhill.

The Fund is wholly managed by Mackenzie Construction and offers grants of up to £1,000, or support through a contribution of workdays from Mackenzie Construction personnel.

Projects located within the Falkirk area will be eligible to apply, with particular emphasis on those with relevance to the canal network or proximity to this year's works. Applications that aim to bring people together, improve local spaces, support vulnerable communities, or help people reach their potential—especially in light of ongoing cost-of-living pressures —will be prioritised.

FEATURES

Bugs, Bees and Butterflies...

Not to Mention Dragons and Damsels

Our canal is a wonderful wildlife corridor, snaking its way through town and country, and in many ways bringing the country into town. It has hugely varied insect life, all the way from showy butterflies to unassuming water bugs.

Butterflies bring extra magic to a stroll along the towpath. They fly here for the abundance of wild flowers growing along the canal banks. The flowers provide a sip of nectar to keep the butterflies going whilst they search for mates. The leaves provide essential food for their caterpillars. In the summer and early autumn look out especially for red admirals, peacocks and small tortoiseshells.

All the flowers also provide plenty of nectar and pollen for the bees. These are a great food source for themselves and for bringing up the next generation. Look closely and you may be surprised at how many species of bee there are, from big buzzy bumblebees to carder bees and tiny mining bees. Plus, of course, other stripy insects such as wasps and hoverflies.

Damselflies and dragonflies are the other showy fliers to be seen along the canal. Look out for bright blue delicate looking damselflies and bigger more robust greenish dragonflies. There are several species of each. They are also looking for food and mates. Food in this case is other smaller flying Insects,





Mating is just above the canal water surface so the eggs can be laid just below, which is where we are going next.

It is a whole other word below the water surface. With a huge variety of insect life making a living here. On our school cruises the kids were fascinated by what they could find. In the early days on smaller boats we could hand them the hand nets and let them fish overboard for themselves. Now, with bigger boats, we collect trays full of water life before the cruises and let the kids make their own discoveries amongst all the animal and plant life.

The eggs of the beautiful damsel and dragonflies turn into mean looking voracious nymphs hunting anything much smaller than themselves. They will spend a year or two munching their way through the insect world until emerging back above water level for their briefer time in the sun. They are joined down there by a whole host of other insect life including beetles, water fleas, water scorpions, water boatmen and many more. All of which eat pretty much anything they can grab. It is a bug eat bug world down there.





FEATURES

Bugs, Bees & Butterflies (cont.)

Breathing is obviously an issue below water. Many, such as damselfly nymphs, have gills. Others, such as water beetles, can take a pocket of air down with them. Water scorpions have a prominent 'sting' at the rear end, which is in fact a snorkel for air breathing.

The school kids were always fascinated by the water boatmen and pond skaters. Water boatmen swim arrand on their backs on the water surface using their legs as paddles. Pond skaters use surface tension to dash around. on the water surface. Both are in the same game, hunting any land-living insect that has landed in the water.

All this wealth of insect life is, in turn, food for the many fish that live in the canal. But that is another story, and only if I can persuade Malcolm to take his camera deep down into the canal.

Pictures - Malcolm Gillies
Words - Paul Carter





FEATURES

Gillies Gallery









Whooper swans

All photos on this page, courtesy Malcolm Gillies

FEATURES

Just One Drop

The second part of the story of our canal's water supply by Paul Carter

They did not hang around in those days and a new reservoir was built at Hillend Moss 1796-1798, said to be the largest reservoir in Europe at the time. Continued expansion of traffic on both canals required yet more water so a new reservoir was built at Lilly Loch, just southwest of Hillend Reservoir and feeding into it. Completed in 1837, costs were shared, 60% by Monkland and 40% by Forth and Clyde.

Still, this was not enough, and in 1841 the canal companies combined forces again to raise the dam and increase the capacity at Hillend.

A site at Roughrigg on the south eastern side of Airdrie was also inspected. In the end the reservoir was built by the Airdrie and Coatbridge Water Company (1846-1849) to supply both drinking water and canal water. It ceased to supply canal water a few decades later and is formally disused, and run as a recreational fishery by the Roughrigg Angling Club.

After fifty years of agreements and construction the canals now had a secure supply of water. To summarise, see the table below.

Now let us return to that drop of rainwater, last seen entering Black Loch. After flowing through the reservoir and sluice it is now taken by the infant North Calder Water, still just a burn, a few miles downstream to Hillend Reservoir.

Hillend is now a much loved loch with an angling club, sailing club, and walkers following lochside paths. Recently the reservoir has been given a major engineering renewal, hopefully

	Area (hectares)	Capacity (million gallons)	Height above sea level (feet)
Black Loch	50	175	709
Hillend Reservoir	140	450	630
Lilly Loch	30	130	697
Roughrigg Reservoir	56	-	-

giving it another century or more of useful life.

Our drop heads down through the dam sluices or over the spillway into the growing North Calder Water. You can walk alongside using the North Calder Heritage Trail. The first part to Airdrie doubles as part of the popular National Cycle Trail 75 from Argyle to Edinburgh The river then flows through the fabulous gorge down to Calderbank. The old steel works in this area built the world's first iron passenger boat, the Vulcan, and later, steel plates for transatlantic liners.

Our drop of rainwater now finds itself confronted by a high weir across the river, which diverts it into the eastern end of the Monkland Canal. You can follow its path along a very pleasant towpath until the canal is suddenly, and for no good reason, piped underground beneath Coatbridge. It is liberated again on the western edge and you can enjoy following it along the southern boundary of Drumpellier Country Park

Our raindrop is, again, imprisoned in an underground pipe from just west of the Park all the way to Glasgow. To follow it you will have to drive along the M8, on the stretch once known as the Monkland Motorway.

It re-emerges into daylight very unobtrusively into the Forth and Clyde Canal at the south west end of Port Dundas. From here it flows to Stockingfield Junction and where now for our adventurous drop water? Westward down the Maryhill Locks and out into the Clyde at Bowling? Or eastward to the Kelpies and the Forth? Well, that decision will be made by a combination of wind direction and the operations of the water engineers at Scottish Canals.

So our drop of rainwater has helped the watersports on Black Loch and Hillend Loch, added to the flow of the scenic North Calder water, increased the water supply to the Monkland and Forth and Clyde canals, and enjoyed a magical mystery tour through central Scotland. Not bad for just one drop landing on a squelchy bog somewhere south of Slamannan.

The eastern end of the canal also has a supply of water from Banton Loch (Townhead Reservoir). To follow the adventures of another drop of rain water falling on the Kilsyth Hills, watch this space.

References

The Canals of Scotland. Jean Lindsay. 1968
The Forth and Clyde Canal Guidebook. FCCS. 2001
Monkland. The Canal That Made Money, Guthrie Hutton, 1993
L.M.S. 2” to 1 mile map, Forth & Clyde and Monkland Canals undated
North Calder Heritage Trail. North Lans. Council. Undated
That kind Mr. Google.

FEATURES

Canal Wildlife Rescue on T.V.

A big fish rescue operation featured on 'Landward'. The Falkirk Flight Lock Gate Replacement programme featured in the last issue of Canal News, has required draining the canal between locks. The T.V. crews were there to show Forth Rivers Trust rescuing up to 500 fish a day from drained sections. They were caught by electrofishing and netting, and transferred upstream of the works. Big eels (up to 30 years old) were rescued, along with tench, pike, roach, perch and toads.


Toad


Perch


Roach


Tench


Pike

FEATURES

Kirkintilloch Canal Heritage Walk

A keen band of Kirkintilloch residents joined Paul Carter for a canal heritage walk. This was held during East Dumbartonshire's Local Heritage month. Old photos and maps were used to show the foundries, boatyards and canal traffic a hundred years ago. The walk was from FCCS office at Southbank Marina to Hillhead Basin and back along the opposite bank to the Millenium Bridge and Marina.




Millenium Bridge

FEATURES

What's Happening on the Forth & Clyde Canal?

Our partners at the Forth Rivers Trust (through their commercial arm Forth Rivers Consulting) have been working in the dewatered canal between locks 15 and 11 to 'rescue' the fish swimming in that section of the canal. Working with our Senior Environmental Scientist Julia Johnstone and Senior Project Manager George McBurnie, they are preparing the canal for one of the biggest programme of engineering works in its history!

Why we are embarking on the engineering works?

In a nutshell, many of the canal's oak lock gates and supporting infrastructure need to be replaced or repaired. It is almost 25 years since the Millennium Link Project (£83.4 million) saved our Lowland canals.

The newly installed gates will be made of sustainably sourced hardwood, which will have a much longer lifetime than the current oak gates (30-40 years versus the 25-year standard for oak).

The works will continue up to March 2026.

Fish rescue involves four key steps:

- The water is lowered in one section to leave just a small channel in the centre of the mud and silt.
- The team at Forth Rivers Trust don waders and enter the canal wearing tanks on their backs. While many of the fish move out of the basin downstream as the water drains away, some stay behind but need to be transfered into the tanks and buckets [for relocation].
- The next step is to measure and document the fish species so that we can use the opportunity to understand more about them. In one day of the fish rescue between locks 16 and 15, the team caught almost 500 fish! Perch and pike are plentiful, and it has been a particularly good year for eels, including silver eels.
- Finally, the fish are released further up the canal above the works where they can swim freely away.

More Information

You can find out more about road and towpath diversions associated with the works on our Ongoing Works pages. If you have questions for us, please contact:
enquiries@scottishcanals.co.uk,
0141 332 6936.

Source: Scottish Canals

SPLASHBACK

From The Canal News Archives

Forty Years Ago

Briga Falkirk was our June 1985 front page story, thousands turning out to enjoy the Scottish National Canal Rally at Falkirk. Local M.P. Dennis Canavan welcomed the crowds to lock 16 where boat trips, including FCCS Cadder Princess, competitive water bat polo, events and stalls all helped build the campaign to reopen the canal. In September we led with 'Guidebook Published'. Edited by Paul Carter, this joint effort between FCCS and EDC libraries went on to three editions over the years. You can still buy a copy of the Millenium Edition from William Patrick library, Kirkintilloch

Thirty Years Ago

Millenium b-Link-ered was our shock July 1995 front-page headline. British Waterways' bid to restore the canals of Central Scotland had just been turned down. However, the massive campaign went on to eventual success.

Twenty Years Ago

Voyager Ventures Forth was our June 2005 front page story, celebrating the launch (by ultra large crane at Hillhead) of our new trip boat. Voyager was built by Heritage Engineering in Carmyle, 60 feet (about 18m) long for 55 passengers with 100 H.P engine. She was officially launched in Kirkintilloch by local M. P. Jo Swinson.

Ten Years Ago

The Maryhill Locks Swim Race was our main feature. Glaswegian, Mark Deans, beat 80 elite international swimmers to win the Red Bull Neptune Steps challenge, which included. climbing rope ladders up all the locks.



Photo via: openwaterpedia.com

IN MEMORIAM

Brian Elder and Chris Cassidy


Brian Elder

Fiona says: *Brian was an absolute gent. Always willing to help.*

Paula says: *Brian joined FCCS about a year before I did, and we worked closely together as a pair of trainees. My favourite memory of Brian was from our grotto - he spent the entire day walking the queue, trying to give away mince pies to the public (they weren't having it!). I loved being on shift with Brian; he'd share all his learnings with me, his tips and his tricks, and it was always a pleasure to listen to his stories about canal holidays with his wife, Jan, and about the latest shenanigans his wee grandson had been up to. He would always have good advice to give or books to recommend. Learning of his passing was devastating, and I miss him tremendously. Wherever he is now, I hope he's managed to hand out his mince pies.*

Adrian says: *When I first joined the society, Chris was one of the first members who introduced himself to me. I remember it was a Wednesday Crew training night, and after being welcomed by everyone, it was nice to meet a member who wasn't called Jim or John.*

My first impression was that he was a very quiet gentleman and tended to keep himself to himself. Still, I got the feeling that he really enjoyed the camaraderie of the society, be it on training nights, members' cruises, or gala days and festivals. It seemed he never wanted to be in the thick of it, preferring instead to be on the periphery, but quick to offer help when help was needed. His electrical knowledge was invaluable when trying to understand the complexities of our boats, and I enjoyed our chats when he took himself off to the side for a cigarette whilst everything was going on.

I was saddened to hear of his passing at the start of the year.


Chris Cassidy

Charter a Society Boat

The Canal Society has a fleet of three boats available for charter. Each boat comes fully crewed. Our boats are an ideal way to enjoy a family celebration or enjoy a cruise for your organisation. Each boat has a galley to organise your own catering.



VOYAGER

Up to 45 passengers or maybe 40 if you are catering. Hourly rate of £150 first hour.



GIPSY PRINCESS

Up to 12 passengers or maybe 20 if you are catering. Hourly rate of £100 first hour



MARYHILL

Up to 10 passengers. Each charter is considered on its merits and the lowest figure would be £100.

Charges are reduced for second and subsequent hours at progressively reduced rates and a full day charter may enjoy a discount. Charities, youth groups and other eligible organisations may be considered for a reduction on the final figure calculated.

The boats are generally based at the Stables Restaurant, Kirkintilloch, G66 1RH. Cruises can also start at Southbank Marina in Kirkintilloch, Spiers Wharf in Glasgow and Auchinstarry Basin, Kilsyth, by special arrangement. One way trips are also sometimes available to Glasgow, Auchinstarry and the Falkirk Wheel, and are advertised on our website.

Further information at forthandclyde.org.uk

SOCIETY NEWS

FCCS Annual Gathering

The Annual Gathering of the Society took place on Thursday 2nd January which was a sunny, dry, cold and frosty day.

Members met at the Marina at noon and boarded Voyager for our first sail of the year which lasted around 90 mins. Voyager left the marina and went left towards Bishopbriggs.

The canal path was extremely busy with cyclists, dog walkers and families out dusting off the cobwebs after the festive celebrations. Lots of waving was going on from the canal path users towards the crew and vice versa. Ages on board ranged from 3 years old to 80 plus years and everything in between. Membership tenure was also highlighted from the very latest member Barbara who joined at the end of November to Tommy and Dave who have been an integral part of the Society for a great number of years.

Hot tea and coffee were plentiful and the lovely home baking was provided by Maureen, with others providing much welcome snacks. Plenty of blethering and catching up was the order of the day.

Barbara under the watchful gaze of Scott had her first shot at steering Voyager and she can't wait till crew training resumes in April to have another go.

Another successful outing thoroughly enjoyed by all those who participated.



Volunteer Glasgow Fair

Volunteer Glasgow held a Volunteers Fair earlier this year. It was held in the absolutely beautiful City Chambers Banqueting Suite. Such a prestigious venue. Never having attended or hosted a table at a volunteer fair, it was very new to us. Potential volunteers asked so many different questions about the roles on offer at the Society, took away information cards and some seemed to be really keen. It was also great to see the other stallholders and their charities and it is hoped that the Society will be able to host joint ventures with some of them. Was well worth attending - need to get table cover for next one though!





SOCIETY NEWS

Mother's Day Cruises

The Society hosted 3 Mother's Day cruises where passengers were treated to afternoon tea and a 2 hour cruise.
"*Everything was just perfect, crew members were lovely and pleasant, Can't fault it, Afternoon tea was fresh and tasty*"
"*A lovely relaxing day out on the water*"
"*It was an absolute joy to sail on the Gipsy Princess*"
"*It was a fabulous day, absolutely loved it*"
"*Would do it everyday if I could, will be recommending to all friends*"

These were just a few of the comments left by our customers who all seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves on what was a very special day.

Watch out on social media for future events like these.



East Dunbartonshire Funding

Great news - East Dunbartonshire Council have awarded the Society funds to install a frame and waterproof canopy on Gipsy Princess. The crew will be delighted with that as it means waterproofs will be a thing of the past on a wet day on the Forth and Clyde Canal. Paula may be wrapped up and smiling but it took her hours after the sail to thaw out and heat up. A waterproof canopy should provide much needed protection from the elements

The Council also awarded us funds to replace the toilet facilities onboard Voyager.



Gypsy Princess Seating

Thanks to Tuulia and Fiona, Gipsy Princess has recently undergone quite a transformation. Some of our volunteers had a go at refurbishing the old worn and stained seating area with a funky bright new tartan material. It was hard work and took a bit of planning and adjusting to get the pattern to match. However, it was worth it in the end as it looks fabulous. You just never know what you will be asked to do as a volunteer!!



Caught on Camera

The view from Panmure across to the Claypits Nature Reserve in Firhill.



Photo: Ronnie Tucker

ABOUT US

Forth & Clyde Canal Society Officers

Chairman - **James Pert**
chairman@forthandclyde.org.uk
Vicechair - [vacant]

Secretary - **Paula Braceland**
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Treasurer - **Tuulia McCourt**
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Membership Secretary - **Fiona Murray**
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Keep in touch with us in a variety of ways:
WEBSITE Visit our website forthandclyde.org.uk for latest news, events, and background information. Contact our webmaster if you wish to help, at our email address.
EMAIL ALERTS keep up with the lastest events etc. Join our email circulation list by contacting: membership@forthandclyde.org.uk

JOIN US AND HELP SAVE THE CANAL

- Campaigning
- Boats
- Socials
- Walks
- Volunteering

Come and enjoy our many activities from boat crewing and maintenance to talks and walks

Annual subs

Family £30/yr
Individual £25/yr
Concession £15/yr
Corporate £50/yr

Contact

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