



**INLAND
WATERWAYS**
ASSOCIATION

WATERWAYS

HERITAGE



A LIVING HERITAGE

BRITAIN'S WATERWAYS ARE HOME TO:



*Over 2700
listed
structures*



*70 listed
ancient
monuments*



*Five UNESCO
world heritage
sites*

Britain's Waterways form a vast, open air network of working canals and rivers, connecting city and countryside, alive with boats and enjoyed by millions. As a heritage asset it is unsurpassed in scale and accessibility, telling the story of Britain's industrial past as well as being important to its future, in terms of tourism, physical and mental health and our national sense of identity.

Across Britain, the history of river navigation and canal building has led to unique and diverse heritage features, all of which are worthy of protection in their own right. The system is not a museum; it is a usable asset, its heritage a living one, and we want to ensure that it is protected in a way that is usable now and in the future.



However, our waterways heritage is at risk – from urban development, lack of protection, loss of skills and knowledge and climate change. IWA aims to improve understanding of what waterways heritage is, how it is at risk and demonstrate its value in terms of regeneration opportunities, visitor enjoyment, tourism and education.

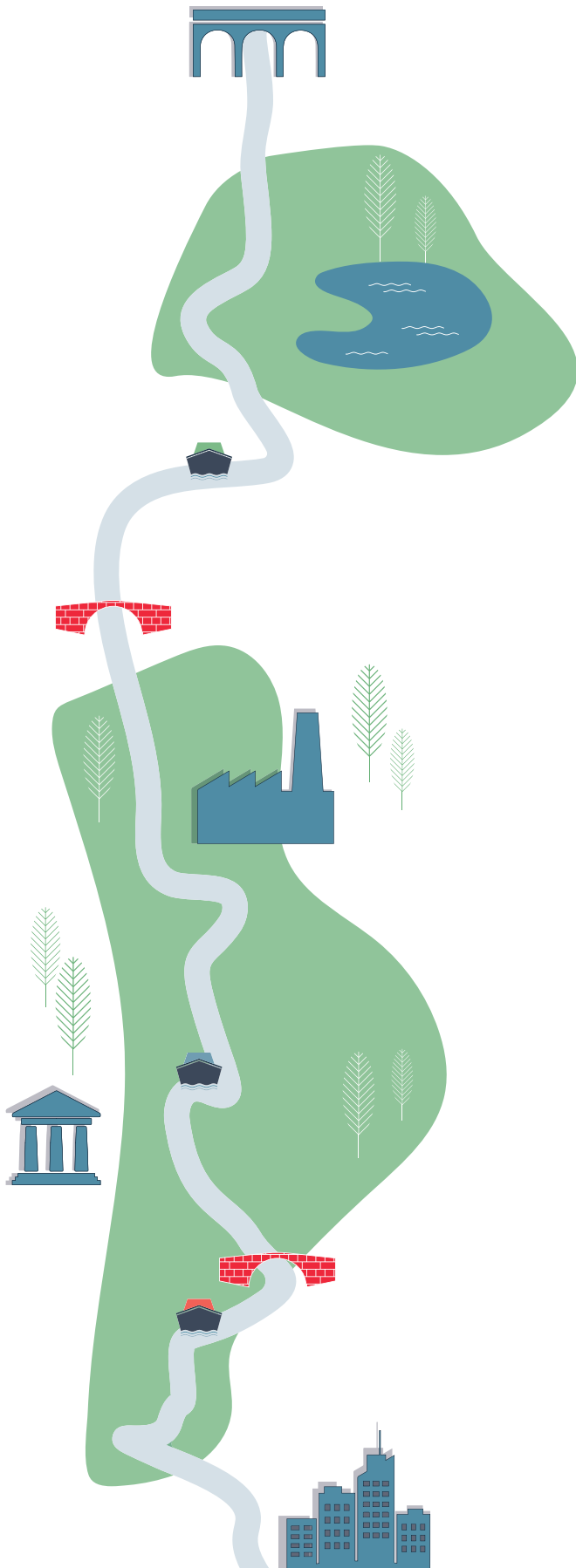
This report forms Part 1 of our focus and aims to set the scene, explaining why waterways heritage is unique and defining what it means. It also builds upon IWA's Value of Inland Waterways report authored by Nicki Schiessel Harvey of Birmingham City University. Her extensive research showed that more work was needed to recognise the value of waterways heritage.

Part 2 will expand upon this, by going into more detail about the value of waterways heritage using a series of in depth case studies, alongside resources to support IWA branch heritage officers and other local groups. This will be part of an ongoing campaign to protect waterways heritage, in partnership with other organisations.

***“ the system is not a museum, it is a usable asset, its heritage a living one.*”**



WHAT MAKES WATERWAYS HERITAGE UNIQUE?



The inland waterways are important because they are a heritage resource that has evolved over centuries of continuous development. During that time they have changed fundamentally, from a set of disconnected local initiatives to a public resource enjoyed by a huge range of users, for leisure and business. Few other heritage systems are still used to this extent and in such a similar way, using much of the same technology as when designed.

Their uniqueness stems from this evolution of the waterways over centuries, as local promoters sought to improve access to raw materials, markets and ports by improving rivers and building canals. Earlier canals followed natural features, winding their way around hills and along valleys. Then, new technologies were developed and engineers were able to cut across the landscape, with embankments, cuttings and aqueducts.

The heyday of the canals was a relatively short period, from the late 18th century until the rise of the railways from the 1840s onwards. Canal companies rarely merged, remaining locally focused and locally managed. Even those which came to be controlled by railway companies remained independent with regards to their engineering.

This meant that there was no co-ordination and little standardisation of the inland waterways. It was never a “national” system until modern times. Thus the heritage of each waterway is unique to that canal or river, as each canal company found a different way to design their infrastructure. This gives a sense of identity to each area’s waterways heritage, and it makes each constituent part more valuable. It also means that it is not possible to preserve just one “example” of a lock or a bridge, as there are so many regional variations. Waterways heritage is much more than the sum of its parts.

WATERWAYS HERITAGE AT RISK

Waterways heritage is at risk for several reasons. Firstly, although many waterways heritage buildings are Listed or Scheduled Ancient Monuments, and many canals are in Conservation Areas, there remain stretches of waterway and related buildings and artefacts which have no protection at all. Although Listing gives some protection, heritage assets can be lost if such protection is ignored or insufficiently enforced. Often there is conflict between retaining heritage assets and maximising development value of waterside sites.

There may be a lack of a sustainable future use for a heritage building or the heritage structures may not always be perceived as attractive. When work is carried out, small details are often lost due to lack of understanding of their importance. The loss of traditional skills is another risk due to a lack of young people to take up heritage skills. Although there are exceptions to this, more could be done to support them. Climate change is another very real risk, as has been demonstrated by the floods over Winter 2019/20.

“Climate change is a very real risk, as recent floods demonstrate.”



Figure of Three Locks, Calder and Hebble Navigation
© David Thompson

THE BENEFITS OF WATERWAYS HERITAGE



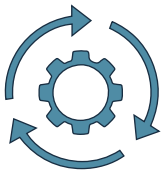
PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH

Canals and rivers create green routes through cities and towns, supporting wildlife and improving the mental and physical health of everyone who lives beside them. Heritage, both built and natural, contributes to how good people feel about the places they live and their quality of life.



ACCESSIBILITY

No other heritage system is as widespread or as accessible as the inland waterways. Anyone can walk along a canal in one of many cities and towns across Britain and help to operate a 200 year old lock mechanism, with no training required, just an enthusiasm to get stuck in and push a balance beam.



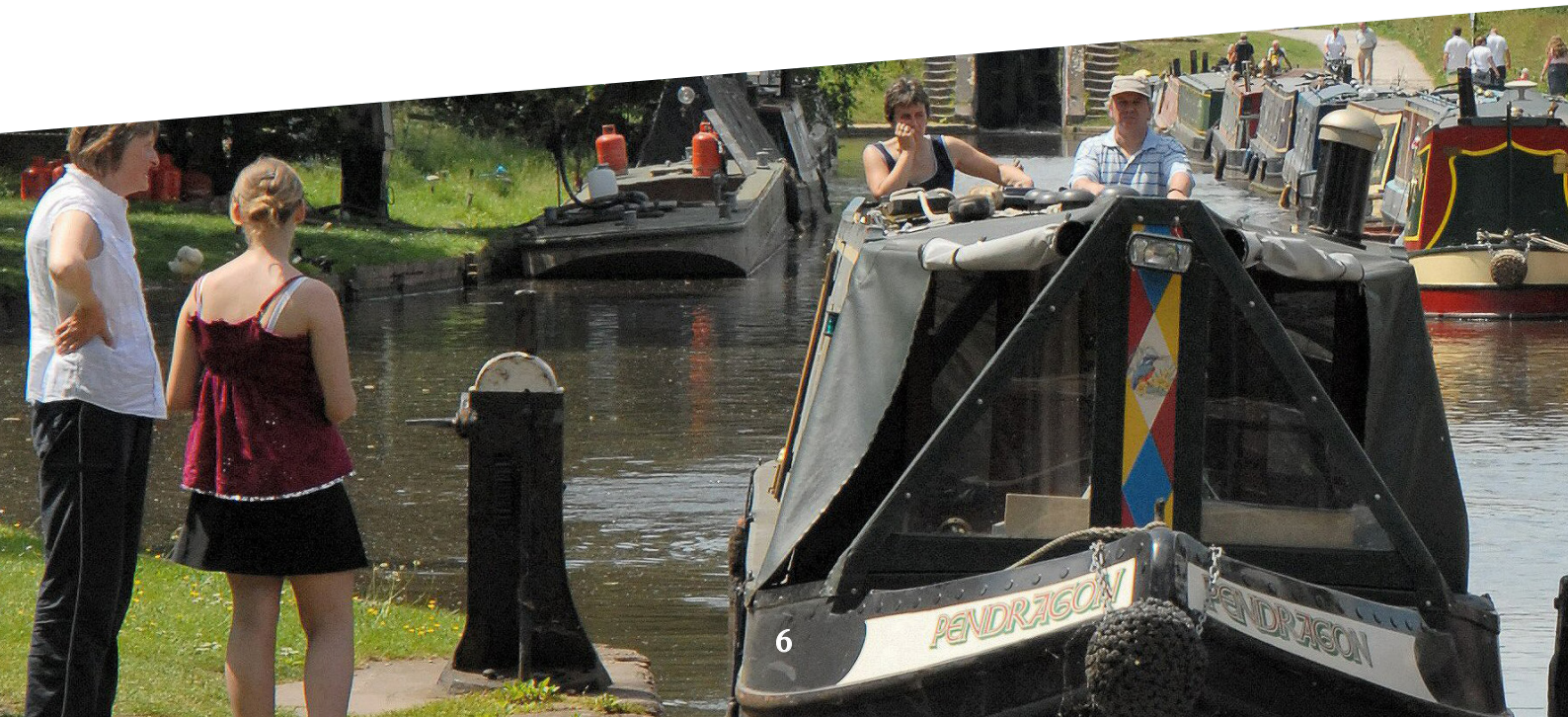
SUSTAINABILITY

Waterways link cities and towns, and due to constraints of geography and history often follow public transport routes, making visiting them incredibly sustainable as well as accessible. Commercial carrying, particularly on the wide waterways in the North of England is another way in which waterways heritage contributes to sustainability. Carrying cargo by water takes vehicles off the roads and reduces emissions. It is essential to maintain the heritage structures and details in order to support commercial carrying by water.



ECONOMY

In recent years canal regeneration has been a catalyst for economic growth in previously deprived areas - heritage alongside environment provides a much needed boost to rural regeneration and economy. The waterways tourism industry is thriving, particularly as concern for the environment and financial reasons, plus recent international health scares mean many people choose to holiday in Britain instead of abroad.



WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME AND MY LOCALITY?

Waterways heritage in its broadest sense (encompassing built, natural, cultural heritage) can be linked to the following benefits:



Improved physical and mental health
Through involvement with education, skills and volunteering



Sustainability
Though commercial carrying and encouraging holidays in Britain instead of abroad



Community cohesion and 'sense of place'
Linked to association with heritage buildings, landscapes or cultural traditions and memories



Healthy business activity
Including jobs and skills



Increased property values
Linked to desirability of quality heritage environments

“ Waterways heritage is much more than the sum of its parts.”



WHAT IS WATERWAYS HERITAGE?

1. WHERE & WHEN?

This report relates to all inland waterways of England, Scotland and Wales, including those derelict/under restoration as their heritage is particularly at risk. In terms of timeframe, instead of setting an arbitrary cut-off date it is more useful to include as “heritage” anything which has a cultural significance. Historic England defines heritage as “the importance attached by people to qualities of places, categorised as aesthetic, evidential, communal or historical value.”

This would mean the restorations carried out in the 1960s and 70s by IWA and other restoration groups to ensure that canals were not lost to navigation would be included in “heritage”, whereas the installation of lock side bollards in the wrong places in the 2000s might not. Essentially if a structure or artefact is meaningful to people it should be considered heritage. Waterways structures as industrial heritage have been the focus of restoration and preservation effort. However in the context of our inland waterways, there is far more to their heritage than architecture and infrastructure.



1.1 INFRASTRUCTURE

Originally canals were owned by different companies and each one designed locks and bridges in slightly different ways. Every canal has slightly differently designed lock mechanisms. Most locks are operated using a handle known as a windlass but some waterways use completely different techniques, such as the Calder and Hebble paddles operated by a handspike.

Loading wharves are another vital part of waterways heritage, particularly for those who make a living trading from working boats. Many former loading wharves have been developed, or access restricted, so that loading the boats often requires a great deal of planning and logistics.

“Waterways heritage is more than architecture and infrastructure.”



1.2 ARCHITECTURE & ENGINEERING

Waterways buildings and engineering structures built to serve them, such as lock keepers' cottages, pumping stations and boatyards are intrinsically waterways heritage, but there were many other industrial and residential structures which were built close to canals and rivers in order to make use of these arteries of commerce. These might include warehouses and factories whose sites were chosen because they could receive raw materials and distribute goods by water. Similarly pubs, shops and churches were built for the boat people who stopped as they passed through, and these have significance not just because of their proximity to the waterways but because of what they meant to the people who used them.



1.3 BOATS

Boats are part of waterways heritage, and there is a life and vibrancy to a working waterway that is not found on an un-navigable stretch of water. The evolution of inland waterways craft mirrors the development of navigations. The dimensions of locks (as well as water depth and bridge air draught) have defined the size of boats which are able to navigate the inland waterways, such that each set of waterways has a type of boat most suited to it, with the boats often being known by the navigation they were used on. For example, Leeds and Liverpool "Short" Boats and Thames Sailing Barges. Narrow boats are used on the narrow canals of the Midlands operated mainly in pairs, with one motor towing a butty. Elsewhere, particularly on wide rivers such as the Severn and the Cambridgeshire Ouse and on the Northern Birmingham Canal Navigations, boats often operated in trains with one motor towing many boats behind it. Aside from the industrial working boats, waterways heritage also includes pleasure and sporting boats, used particularly on rivers such as the Thames and the Broads such as smaller wooden rowing and sailing craft.



Loaded short boat A41 at Bridge 6, Leeds & Liverpool Canal Leigh Branch 1972 (Bill Greenhalgh)



1.4 DETAILS

Heritage also includes those small details of waterways system artefacts such as those designed or evolved to facilitate towing. Horses were the primary mode of propulsion up until the early 20th century, and after that, towing on long lines was still vital to efficient cargo carrying by boat.

Towing is still carried out today, either by pairs of boats, single handed boaters or horses. Iron bridge guards stop grit covered lines from damaging stonework as they rub across, and in some places rollers were installed. Bridges with splits in their spans allow towing lines to pass through with ease. Strapping posts are used to bring an unpowered boat to a stop or to help it around a sharp bend. Starting pins allow a towing line to be doubled back on itself, using physics to

get a heavily loaded boat moving more easily when being towed. More recent details can also tell a story, for instance the hatches on Birmingham's canal bridges for water supply to fight fires in WW2.

Some of these, particularly small details such as starting pins are not obvious, and are at risk from being removed when repairs and maintenance are carried out simply because not everyone knows why they are there and that they are still used. Other details like strapping posts, are more obvious but their exact position is crucial if they are to be useful to boaters.

“ Heritage details are at risk from being removed when repairs and maintenance are carried out.





1.5 HERITAGE SKILLS

The skills needed to operate boats on the inland waterways are alive and continually evolving. However there are some aspects, particularly the skills relating to operating historic boats or pairs of boats, which need to be supported if they are to continue. The infrastructure such as the details previously mentioned need to be in place for these skills to be practised. It is not just the historic boat enthusiasts who still practice these skills either. As the waterways have evolved to be used by leisure and liveaboard boaters, they have found new ways to use old skills. One example is the way single handed boaters use towing techniques such as bow hauling. In this instance the old splits in bridges are vital. Those who make a living working on the waterways, either trading from their boats, carrying cargo or passengers, need to use these traditional techniques to maximise efficiency.

Boatbuilding skills are also an important part of waterways heritage, both for the maintenance of existing boats and building new ones which look right in a heritage context. Some boatyards specialise in traditional techniques such as riveting and wooden boatbuilding, and these skills need passing down to ensure they are not lost, through support for apprenticeships and skills training programmes.

“The infrastructure needs to be in place for these skills to be practiced.”



Strapping in using a lock gate to slow the boat and shut the gate © R Parrott



1.6 LANDSCAPE & VIEWS

The aesthetic of landscape (be it industrial or rural) in which a waterway is situated is also part of the overall heritage. Views of waterways have value to developers but there needs to be as much thought given to the views from the waterway. Any proposals for change to the waterway environment should be preceded and informed by a full understanding of how it came to be as it is. The regeneration of Birmingham's canals has been a great success in terms of regeneration but iconic waterways heritage buildings and views were lost in the process.

“ There needs to be as much thought given to the views from a waterway as the views of it. ”



Sign writer Dave Moore paints a modern boat in a traditional style © A Tillson



1.7 CULTURE

Waterways heritage also encompasses the culture of the people who live and work on the canals and rivers, both in the past and present. The boat families of the past developed a distinct culture that was born out of their isolation from land based communities due to always being on the move. The beautifully painted boats and personal items such as water cans are well known examples and there are still those who paint in this tradition. However there are other less tangible remnants of this culture such as the language (names for boat parts and skills,

as well as places) which are also threatened. Music and the spoken word have often been important ways in which waterways stories have been passed down. Today's boaters have evolved their own sense of culture and identity, some of which is based in the old traditions. There is a community spirit amongst boaters, stemming from a shared love of an alternative but sometimes difficult way of life. They have often colonised less well-loved spaces of towns and cities, bringing a vibrancy and identity to spaces which previously felt less safe.

“The Inland Waterways Association is calling on Navigation Authorities, councils, planning authorities, developers, builders to think about heritage as they make plans for the future of our waterways and the features alongside them.

IWA asks them to consider the impact of seemingly small changes on the broader heritage we have been gifted and to speak to heritage organisations when trying to understand the impacts and how any detrimental effects might be mitigated.



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“IWA has worked to save waterways heritage since 1946, help us continue by getting involved.”



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