



Volunteers at work on part of Newport Canal on Saturday as part of the restoration effort



Members of the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust enjoying a "Dinghy Dawdle"



More than 1,200 people have now joined the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust

Call to get behind canal networks' restoration

Enthusiasts are working to restore the area's network of lost canals. PAM KINGSLEY reports

THEY were the motorways and railways of their day - the only way to move everything from coal to cotton around the country cheaply and efficiently.

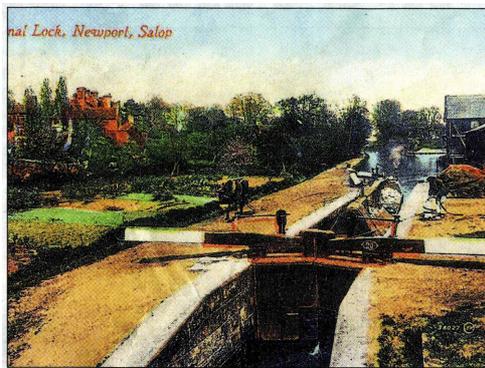
But when the railways came, followed by the internal combustion engine, many of Britain's canals were abandoned. Eventually they were drained, filled in and forgotten. Now the Canal & River Trust is calling on people to get behind plans to restore some of the county's lost canals.

The trust highlights 98 "lost" canals, including the the Shropshire Union Canal, between Shrewsbury, Newport and Norbury Junction, which was officially abandoned in 1944.

Precious

Richard Parry, chief executive of the Canal & River Trust, said: "There are hundreds of miles of abandoned waterways. Each played a role in making Britain the world's first industrial nation and many are being lovingly restored by dedicated volunteers."

"Sadly there are still too many miles of precious canal in need of restoration but the lesson from the canal restoration movement of the last 50 years shows just what can be achieved if enough people get behind an idea."



The Canal Lock in Newport from an old postcard dated December 3, 1910

The Shropshire Union Canal runs 66 miles from Ellesmere Port to Wolverhampton and was completed in 1835.

It branched off at Norbury Junction, near Newport, through the town and ran all the way to Shrewsbury.

But much of that route has been covered over after the canal was officially abandoned in 1944.

Since 2000 the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust has been working to restore the line.

Members are currently restoring a section of the canal in Newport.

More than 1,200 people have now joined the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust and a small section in Newport could be back in water before too long, thanks to volunteers who have been working since January to dig out the locks long buried near the town's bypass.

The project also involves bringing the canal, which opened in 1797, back into Shrewsbury as well as creating a visitor centre at the historic Wappenshall Wharf, just outside Telford.

Last Saturday a special work

party was held to start to eliminate Himalayan Balsam, an invasive foreign plant, from the Newport Canal.

John Myers from the Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust said: "Thirteen volunteers turned up and we worked the area to the east of Town Lock, as that is upstream and the first that needed clearing."

"As far as I can judge we are now clear of Himalayan balsam on the canal to the east of Town Lock - for this year. If we persevere we will, hopefully, eliminate it here in two to three years."

"We used body harnesses to access the area immediately below Fishers Lock where the bank drops away and the balsam was hard to get at."

"We had two boats and these were used to take people across the canal to access the offside, to access difficult areas and to transport balsam across the canal for disposal. We found that, with difficulty, we could walk along the very steep offside bank and some volunteers managed to access the balsam that way."

"Some work was also done on the balsam that was starting to

invade the park on the north side of the canal.

"Finally we worked eastwards along the banks of Victoria Park, to join up with the work already done, very heavy going through head high nettles and undergrowth."

Mr Myers added: "Hopefully our efforts this year will mean that next year we will need to do much less to the east and will be able to spend some time on the area to the west of Town Lock, where it is very bad."

That afternoon members of the group also took a "Dinghy Dawdle" along the full length of the canal.

Paddled

"This meant they paddled when they could and manoeuvred the boats around problems like infilled locks by hand," said Mr Myers.

"Three canoes took part and it was fantastic to see pleasure boats on the canal in Newport again."

The Canal & River Trust has published an online map highlighting the country's lost waterways.

Mr Parry said: "Over 200 miles of canals have been restored since the turn of the millennium."

"These restorations have brought prosperity to communities, boosted property prices and helped local people to lead active, healthy lifestyles. "We want more people to appreciate the importance of these historic canals and play their part in supporting and championing the heroic efforts of local canal restoration groups."

For more details visit <http://canal-rivertrust.org.uk/restoration>