

## NORTHWICH HERITAGE

Canal and River Trust have recently decided that it wishes to dispose of the previous headquarters and works of the RIVER WEAVER NAVIGATION TRUST, in Navigation Road, Northwich. These premises came into the possession of the Docks and Inland Waterways Executive when it was first formed in 1948, as a side issue resulting from the nationalisation of the British Railways network.

This organisation subsequently was re-titled British Waterways and, some years ago, changed its name and status yet again to become the Canal and River Trust.

In practical terms, over the last 75 years the aim of the government of the day, and with whatever title the government has imposed on this organisation, has been to ensure that the British inland waterways navigations - its canals and rivers - and its property and ancillary support structure should operate in a profitable business like manner for the benefit of the nation.

Some years ago British Waterways closed the comprehensive works they had in Navigation Road, Northwich, sacked the highly skilled workforce they had previously employed to make lock gates, repair boats, make new bridges and efficiently maintain the local waterways - so they would then have to purchase inferior products from less knowledgeable and competent private suppliers.

Now, the Canal and River Trust have taken the last step in this sorry saga - they have invited developers to purchase this enormously prestigious and historic waterside site to do with as they wish, within the confines of planning restraints, of course, and, unless they can be brought to account, the most important and significant international historical site in Cheshire will disappear to be dealt with at the whim of profit hungry developers!!

All this arranged and promoted by a government supervised Trust who should have a duty to benefit and protect the nations interests above all else!!

Why are these premises, workshops, site and river frontage so incredibly important??

This site was acquired in September 1751 by the recently created Weaver Navigation Trust and the first committee meeting was held in the office of the Timber Yard at Castle in January 1779. It became the management and maintenance headquarters until its closure by British Waterways about 230 years later.

The decisions taken here at Navigation Rd., all taken by the Management Committee, who were eminent Cheshire citizens - the government Act insisted this should be so - affected not only local, but national and world history, in part because of the magnificent way in which the navigation was managed and developed, and therefore its impact was immense.

Briefly, the salt beds beneath Cheshire near Northwich could produce, arguably, the cheapest, best quality salt available in Europe, because of the superb development of this, originally, very minor river, the Weaver, (it is only 40 miles long in total, 20 miles is navigable and the entire River course is contained totally within Cheshire) as this excellent product could be delivered in enormous quantity to a significant Port, Liverpool, very cheaply.

This continued to apply through the centuries as the Weaver, which was always exceptionally well managed, being constantly widened, improved and developed to keep pace with the increasing size of international and coastal shipping.

What were the longer term results of this superb management? Salt was at its cheapest in Cheshire and demand increased as salt became a staple requirement also needed for producing other chemicals being demanded in a developing world - so Cheshire County became the leading chemical producing area, with its capability of also distributing these allied products internationally very cheaply because of the low cost of water transport offered for both barges and seagoing freighters.

And so, Cheshire thrived. It's infinite salt availability from both mine and brine along the Weaver Valley and the very low transportation costs created enormous job opportunities and subsequent prosperity for the County. Brunner Mond, which eventually became ICI Ltd., located its major chemical plant and Headquarters in Northwich, and research laboratories created other opportunities. Polythene was first discovered in Northwich in 1934, perhaps the most used plastic in the world?

The Great Slave Trade was, in part, created and supported by Salt, produced and shipped by the very men who were also appointed Trustees of the River Weaver, and few stories have a greater impact on world history than this sorry saga.

One of the most imaginative and inspirational of all power driven engineering structures, very high risk, but successful, was created at Anderton and conceived and, in part, built on this site at Navigation Road. Power hydraulics was a little known science when the original Lift was built, but it worked magnificently and was copied for use in Europe and Canada.

The nation's largest Salt Mine, at Winsford, owes the details of its existence to the Weaver Navigation. Incredibly, it has over 150 MILES of underground roadway beneath the Weaver Valley and its prime mineshaft is only a few metres away from its once essential despatch point - the River Weaver.

The enormous amount of commercial boat traffic generated on the Weaver, created its own ancillary activities - boat building, of course, for commercial users, and many small boat builders came, and went, but the two most successful, Yarwood's and Pimblott's built craft that travelled the world's oceans and were also commissioned by our own armed forces to defend our nation.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY TO CIRCULATE ALL THIS INFORMATION???

BECAUSE ALL THE DECISIONS THAT MADE ALL THESE ACTIVITIES, CREATIONS, MASSIVE EVENTS HAPPEN, and many more besides, WERE MADE ON THESE PREMISES THAT ARE NOW ON OFFER TO ESTATE DEVELOPERS FOR COMMERCIAL GAIN!!!

The invitations to tender for the site were made, some months ago, by Canal and River trust, not to those who would wish to protect this site to explain to the intelligent and the curious, supported by Heritage societies, education authorities, local councils, tourist organisations, enthusiast groups and others who would wish to spread the word proudly that this site could produce tourist interest, museum and educational study potential, celebration opportunities, specialist study centres AND fascinating job opportunities for the benefit of the nation, BUT to those who will wish only to make the biggest buck fastest.

The headquarters building, which contains two prestigious boardrooms, has a commanding location overlooking the Weaver and elegant Hayhurst Swing Bridge, and many other rooms that could be used for a multiplicity of purposes, with a clock and bell tower adjacent and a rare 35ton Scotch Derrick Crane, installed in 1923 and equipped with control gear manufactured by Royce, of Manchester, who also built the original Rolls Royce cars.

These premises should be managed by a public corporate body for the benefit of all, and developed as a tourist and leisure centre to bring pleasure, happiness and interest to all. Tourism centres can easily be destroyed by the willful activities of the greedy or ignorant, and cannot be restored

Come on, Canal and River Trust, for once, do your job properly, justify your existence in a creative manner, rather than continue to sell the family silver, as you have done so many times in the past.

Dispose of your assets, if you must, by promoting their disposal for the benefit of the people.

Create something of which to be proud.