

NORTHWICH HERITAGE

Canal and River Trust have just sold the previous headquarters and works of the RIVER WEAVER NAVIGATION TRUST, in Navigation Road, Northwich. These premises came into the possession of the nation when the Weaver Navigation Trust was legally acquired by the government in 1948, as a side issue resulting from the nationalisation of the previously privately owned British Railways and Canals 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 stated 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 an efficient business like manner for the benefit of the nation.

20 years ago British Waterways closed the comprehensive engineering works and boatyard they had in Navigation Road, Northwich, dismissed the highly skilled workforce they had previously employed to make lock gates, repair boats, make new bridges and efficiently maintain other special unique equipment for the local waterways - so they would then perforce have to purchase inferior products from less knowledgeable and less competent private suppliers!

Now, the Canal and River Trust have taken the last step in this sorry saga - they have sold this enormously prestigious and historic waterside site to new owners to do with as they wish, (within the confines of planning restraints, of course), and, unless the new owners can be persuaded to develop this site beneficially and with great understanding, this most important and significant international historical site, the pride of Cheshire, and with enormous tourist potential, will disappear to be dealt with at the whim of a profit motivated development company.

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 then recently created Weaver Navigation Trust and the first Trustees Meeting was held in the office of this Timber Yard at Castle in January 1779. It then became the management and maintenance headquarters of the River Weaver until its closure by British Waterways about 230 years later.

The decisions taken here at Navigation Rd., by the Trustees of the Management Committee, who were, "gentlemen of Cheshire," - the government Act of 1729 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). 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 was always exceptionally well managed, being constantly widened, improved and developed using the latest engineering devices to keep pace with the increasing size of international and coastal shipping.

What were the longer term results of this superb management? Fine quality salt was at its cheapest in Cheshire and demand increased as salt was the staple requirement needed for food preservation - as well as producing other salt based chemicals being demanded in a developing world. 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 the research laboratories created other enormous opportunities. Polythene was discovered in Northwich in 1934, perhaps still the most used plastic in the world?

The GREAT SLAVE TRADE was, in a major way, created and supported by quality Salt, produced and shipped by the very men who were also appointed Trustees of the River Weaver, and FEW DECISIONS HAVE HAD A GREATER IMPACT ON WORLD HISTORY than this sorry saga.

One of the most imaginative and inspirational of all power driven engineering facilities of its time, the very high risk, but successful, Boat Lift, 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 its existence to the Weaver Navigation. Incredibly, it has 150 MILES of underground roadway beneath the Weaver Valley and its prime mineshaft is only a few metres away from its once essential despatch points - 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 THE BUILDING WHERE ALL THE DECISIONS THAT MADE ALL THESE ACTIVITIES, CREATIONS, MASSIVE EVENTS HAPPEN, and many more besides, WERE MADE ON THESE PREMISES HAVE NOW BEEN SOLD TO ESTATE DEVELOPERS TO DO WITH AS THEY WILL!!

The invitations to tender for the site were issued, 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, BUT to those who wish only to develop it in any way they think fit.

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 were not approached.

The headquarters building, which contains two prestigious meeting rooms, has a commanding location overlooking the Weaver and elegant Hayhurst Swing Bridge. Many other rooms could be used for a multiplicity of purposes, with a listed 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 wilful activities of the greedy or ignorant, and cannot be restored.

We would hope that the new owners have an appreciation of the fantastic background and opportunities offered by this site, and will consider the many water related and associated activities - small boat hire, trip boat operation, prestige entertainment activities, tourism opportunities, art gallery and business promotion premises and encourage the very water based activities that should have been THE FIRST PRIORITY of Canal and River Trust itself.

Please tell us about your interests, business ideas, funding and any commitment you can make.

Contact us on comms@rwns.co.uk or visit River Weaver Navigation website. <https://rwns.co.uk/>

