

# Friends of PRESIDENT



# 195

# April 2014

'Friends of President' is a support group working for the Black Country Living Museum, Tipton Road, Dudley, DY1 4SQ

(Registered Charity No: 504481)

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All items for inclusion in the newsletter to be sent to the editor, contact details above.

### **Help raise funds for Friends of President**

By searching the internet using <http://fop.easysearch.org.uk/>  
Current total : £50.10p from 5,372 searches

By shopping online via <http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/fop>  
Current total : £337.81p from 26 registered supporters

**Website : <http://nb-president.org.uk/>**

## **Editorial**

Welcome to the April edition, to save you searching for any April fool items in this issue, Ill tell you now - there aren't any. I left it too late to think about it, must start planning next year's, if I'm still editor and there is still something to edit. Next month is looking a bit bare at the moment, so if you have promised anything or I have asked for something, please send it in.

I'm putting the final touches to this edition sitting in my campervan at Kingsbury Water Park. It's alongside the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal, a route we haven't used on *President* ever since we spent nearly a whole day stuck in a bridge hole, with three BW (as was) men helping us to clear a passage.

It was nice to get some feedback from a couple of items in the last issue, namely the photo on the front, and the photos in the gallery. Details later. Many thanks to you both.

## **Crewing Update**

The message from Malcolm is that we need more crewing volunteers for some of the trips, and for the sales stand at Crick. Please refer to the crewing list, sent previously, to see if there are any trips that you can do. If you have misplaced the list, there is a copy on the Members Pages on our website.

Malcolm has also said that he has received another form without a name on it, so if /when you send your form in please make sure that your name is on it.

## **Work Party News**

There will be a work party Saturday 5th April at 10am, bring overalls and gloves. Please let Richard Prince know if you can attend (details in contact list on page 2).

The list of jobs to do reads as follows, take down the running gear, clear the hold, move boat to the crane wharf, remove the ballast, remove the shuttes, treat the floor, and then put everything back.

It isn't as hard as it sounds, the crane does the heavy lifting, and you get to know more about the boat and what is usually under the coal. We are a friendly bunch, and you can eat some of the best fish and chips around ( at reduced prices).

Richard has also said that there may be a film crew there as well. He doesn't say who or what they are filming though.

## **Trip Report** - Canal du Midi Part 1

Earlier this year I mentioned to Neil (Editor in chief)) that Pauline and I would be going on a trip on the Canal du Midi and he suggested that I might like to put pen to paper and prepare a piece for possible inclusion in a future edition of 195.

By way of fact the Canal was built by Pierre- Paul Riquet between 1666 and 1680 and runs eastwards two hundred and forty kms. from Toulouse to Bassin de Thau through 103 locks.

Before telling you about the trip here is the background to it.

Pauline and I have friends Andrew and Jan, he being an artist but what we didn't realise when we first bumped into them (not literally) many moons ago on the Grand Union canal on their narrow boat "Albert" were the several coincidences that existed between us. These became

apparent as we periodically met on the “cut”. Firstly Pauline’s sister had actually had lessons with Andrew many years before. A and J had lived in Eastbourne in the same road as one of Pauline’s nephews, then had gone to live in Andalucia and live in a little village no more than an hour away from where we have our house, they moored “Albert” in the same marina as we moored “Iberia” etc etc. Clearly we had more than a bit in common and so began our friendship.

In the mid eighties Andrew had gone to France with the intention of purchasing a property to renovate as a holiday home, however his plans changed somewhat when he came across an ex working Barge that was for sale on the Canal du Midi. His long standing love of all types, shapes and sizes of boats prevailed and he together with three friends purchased “Athos”. She was traditionally built in 1964 as a commercial sand, grain and wine Barge, but in 1982 had been converted into a luxury holiday vessel. She is 105 feet in length and weighs 185 tons.

Andrew and co. continued to run “Athos” as she was now intended, making many improvements along the way but in the mid nineties the boat and business was sold to the then (and now) Captain Julian, and Andrew’s adventure with “Athos” was over save for the fact that every year since then he has held a week’s painting holiday on board. Folk come from around the world to enjoy this fantastic holiday, many return again and again.

Our interest in “Athos” started about eighteen months back when Andrew knowing that we love small boat cruising asked if Pauline and I would like to be a part of this year’s cruise even if we didn’t paint. How long did it take to say YES to a week aboard a luxury hotel Barge, eating fabulously prepared food, drinking great wine and slipping through the most spectacular of scenery - about one second that’s all. We had actually been talking about doing something similar for quite some time but had never quite “pushed the button”.

Fast forward to July this year when Pauline and I flew to Carcassonne and then took the train to Beziers where we met up with A and J plus six other folk (two from Canada, two Americans and two from the UK) with whom we were to share the week on “Athos”. Two of the ship’s crew collected us all and drove us eastwards to the charming little port town of Marseillan the home of Noilly Prat vermouth, which is situated on the Etang de Thau (a massive lagoon ) which is Europe’s largest oyster and mussel park and is just a stone’s throw away from the Mediterranean sea. “Athos” was moored there and awaiting us. All in all a most scenic place.



After a champagne reception with scrumptious canapes and with all the necessary introductions and safety briefing completed we had a delicious supper on deck as the sun slowly slipped away. A lot of very nice wine was drunk until quite late on as we all got to know each other.

Next morning was glorious with some folk actually painting before breakfast. Pauline and I spent the morning exploring the lovely little town before returning to the boat for lunch, which was served at anchor way out in the Etang, it was a fantastic experience. At mid afternoon we left the Etang and entered the Canal du Midi, it was seriously hot and our two hostesses Zsuzsa and Christina looked after our refreshment needs splendidly although there was a “just help yourself” bar on board if you so wished. The Canal rose from the salt flats into more verdant tree lined countryside then into the River Herault and having passed through several locks we moored in the countryside close to the village of Portiragnes, which some of us walked to by moonlight after an excellent supper.



Next morning yours truly took a very early solo walk and then after breakfast whilst lots of painting was taking place Pauline and I walked (as we had done the previous night) to the lock ahead and into the village. The smell of fresh coffee and croissants, there’s nothing like it! Our plan was to get back to “Athos” before lunch and then for those who wished to take bikes to ride about four or five kms to swim or paddle in the Med as we were that close. Only four of us completed the journey, it was a great appetizer for lunch.

During the afternoon we cruised and climbed steadily towards Beziers where we had a 16-30 scheduled appointment with the Eclusier at the bottom lock on the Fonserranne flight. The flight here totals eight locks and includes a staircase of seven locks raising the water level two hundred and fifteen metres.



It is a real spectacle with hundreds of people “gongoozling”, water flowing down hill from chamber to chamber in volume and at a speed the like of which I had never seen before and for us “Athos” making her way up through the flight with only an inch or two to spare either side. Pauline and I had exited at the bottom lock and had a bird’s eye view of proceedings as well as

the beautiful Saint-Nazaire Cathedral across in Beziere. There is an inclined plane here that was once used and there is talk of a possible re-opening.

We moored for the night at the top of the locks and enjoyed a superb evening meal prepared by Andy our chef. Why is it that cheese in France tastes so good?

Part 2 will follow next month.

### **Guernsey update from Carole Atkinson**



Hello from Sunny Guernsey.

This picture was taken today at about 4pm from the terrace of a little pub restaurant opposite Grand Havre where we stopped for a drink.

It is sometimes hard to remember we are not on holiday at weekends when the weather is good.

But we have had some very soggy times – only two completely dry days I think since October (until this week). As that is when Ron joined me over here, you can guess who is getting the blame. There has been some flooding in coastal areas and where the drains just couldn't cope with the downpours, but all is drained away very rapidly. The breaches in coastal defences will take some time to repair however, and may lead to new taxes!! The entire budget for this year has already been spent and the Vason breach is being estimated to cost hundreds of thousands.

Our place is very near the airport, which is heaven for someone who is a plane enthusiast, and a radio enthusiast etc etc (I wonder who that might be?) It is dead handy when leaving the island as it is a short walk away so no car parking fees to find. It is on the highest ground on the island too so no flooding here. It is a bit remote ..... well that's what the locals tell me.....it takes all of 10 minutes to get to work or 15 if I catch the school traffic!! Such a long way.

Actually it takes only an hour to drive right around the island as it is only 25 square miles, but I am told once you have lived here for a while, it does start to feel onerous having to go all the way to the other end of the island for something!!

Speed is something that is alien here. Maximum speed limit on the roads is 35 miles an hour, often reduced to 25 in built up areas (that is nearly everywhere) and the little lanes (Ruelle Tranquilles) where you could touch the hedge on both sides standing in the middle of the road, the limit is 15miles per hour!! I think I have been in fifth gear half a dozen times only. It isn't worth it as you stay at 35 for only a few yards before some hazard makes you slow down again. There is no shortage of high performance cars on the road, for all that – what the point is I don't know.

We do suffer from fog up here in the hills (about 300 foot above sea level) which does sometimes make the island feel very distant from home as we can't get off. And the dreadful weather we've been having has stopped the ferries more than once. With a population of 65,000 we soon notice shortages in the shops when the boats can't get in with fresh supplies.



There is a decided lack of canals of course, and therefore canal boats, but this one moored in Beaucette Marina made us think fondly of the old country. I think it is reminiscent of a Norfolk Broads cruiser – how it ended up here I don't know. Apparently there are a couple of lads living on board. (I think it's a good way to get round the residency rules which are stringent.)

I see my role as secretary has not been filled yet. If you could organise your committee meetings over here I could resume you know.

(Aah – I see a fly in the ointment. Our illustrious leader does like to site as much of the activity as possible at the museum. Mmm – hard to get round that one.)

The only thing we are short of here is Annual Leave which makes all the festivals rather hard to service. Ron has been offered a job with the States as a Driver handyman – though it hasn't materialised yet (wheels turn very slowly here – only two months since the verbal offer) So Ron may find it very difficult to crew on your boating programme. You may say that's nothing new, but as he is now free of shift work it might have been easier ..... but then someone dragged him across the channel 270 miles away. He was kicking and screaming but.... needs must.....

Well – I expect you've heard enough from me for now. I may send another instalment later in the year. I hope we can catch up with a few of you during the year in England and our friends can always find a safe berth here.

**Carole Atkinson & Ron Jackson**

### **Media mentions**

Towpath Talk April issue - in the In Brief column they are reporting that we are hoping that one or more of our members will step forward to run the sales stand.

### **Museum News** (courtesy of the museum website)

The Museum is celebrating raising £62,000 which will be used to recreate history at the award-winning destination. Birchills, one of the UK's last surviving wooden joey boats as listed on the National Register of Historic Ships, has been thrown a lifeline with a cash boost that ensures vital restoration work gets the go ahead.

A substantial programme of work will commence later in the spring and will involve stabilisation, some reconstruction, restoration and cosmetic work. Given the specialised nature of the work, the majority of the project will be undertaken by external experts experienced in the construction and restoration of wooden canal boats and traditional cabins, although Museum volunteers will also work alongside them to acquire basic skills in wooden boat conservation.

Once restored to its former glory Birchills will join the Museum's general exhibitions and a costumed demonstrator will illustrate life aboard the traditional boat. Birchills will feature in Museum events such as the Boaters' Gathering as well as other local boat shows thus ensuring that a long-forgotten way of life and authentic part of Black Country's industrial history is preserved for future generations.

## **Feedback from last issue**

I wanted to thank you for the last 195 - and especially the front cover photo. I saw the person and wondered who it was - and learnt it was David Goodman.

I knew David long before that - when he was a member of Stratford Canal Society and he crewed for my father Stan Clover, on our boat "Emscote" a motorised, wooden butty. We were all very involved with the restoration of the Stratford Canal and David Hutchings - in my case just as a 10 year old girl loving anything to do with canals. I even have a photo of my meeting the Queen Mother at the re-opening ceremony in 1964, and I had been forced to wear a dress!

I met David again many years later and arranged to visit his house to see some old photos and slides. He also showed me some of President - a boat of course I knew but did not realise that you could volunteer to be on the crew. That is how I got involved and have had many happy trips since, starting with my "Maiden's Trip" which I wrote up for a 195 article last year on Kildare working with the horse.

Harry Stoopman (who I met crewing President) also knew David and wanted to get in touch. He remembers being called a "good lad" - he was over 40 - by David when he was learning and helping him in the 'ole, marvelling at the energy of an older man who got up so early and worked all day in the heat.

**Penny Clover**

As a matter of interest regarding the three old photos taken on the Farmers Bridge flight in Birmingham.

Photo 1 :- Is a mirror image looking up the flight to lock 11. The road crossing the bridge is Ludgate Hill. The Post Office Tower, as it was called, was started in Sept. 1965 and completed in Oct 1967. Griffin House is next to the canal on the left hand side looking up the flight.

Photo 2. :- Is lock 11 and is exactly as it looks at the present time on Ludgate Hill. Griffin House is the building opposite. Note, all gates on the Birmingham and Fazeley canal have single bottom gates and this bottom gate is the only one with the beam on the off side, this is because the building situated on the left comes almost up to the lock. The photo is the correct way round.

Photo 3 :- Is also a mirror image taken at lock 8 looking towards lock 9 which is under the bridge crossing Newhall St. The photo was taken before the building, (Brindley House), now straddling canal on the opposite side of the bridge was built, under which lock 10 is now. The Birmingham Assay office ('The Anchor') stands beside this lock.

All the buildings along this stretch of the canal have been demolished and new flats erected on the off side. The old science museum was situated on the left and the ground is now about to be built on.

**Tony Tibbins**