

GOING WITH THE FLOW



Canal boat horses take a rest

BETWEEN TWO WATERWAYS

At Christmas my extended family rented a four-storey Victorian townhouse in Llangollen, an old mill town on the edge of Snowdonia in North Wales. I was the one who made the booking and I have to admit to reasons other than the town's beauty and the splendid house – it has both canal and river.

As a child growing up in Cheshire in the north west of England, I always knew our water came from the River Dee. However, how it reached the concrete pen that was the Hurlleston reservoir and water works just outside my home town of Nantwich was something of a mystery. It was only now that I discovered the route it took. The raging river I gazed at from the first floor window was the Dee, and the canal behind us was filled with

water that would eventually reach Hurlleston.

I don't know how many rivers have names in three languages – not simply translations, but names that are, or have been, in regular use. Here we have English, clearly, as the Dee, Welsh Afon Dyfrdwy, and Latin Deva Fluvius from the days when Romans roamed the earth – the Dee flows through Chester, a town founded as a Roman fort (Deva Victrix) in the days when Latin was still alive.

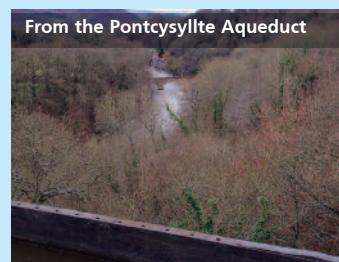
The Dee rises in the mountains of Snowdonia, the National Park whose peaks dominate North Wales. The specific mountain is Dduallt, near Llanuwchllyn, from where it winds its tiny way down to Bala Lake. After Bala it becomes a more significant river, steadily growing as other small water courses join its tumble towards the sea.

THE ELLESMERE CANAL

How it came to be the source of water for parts of South Cheshire began with an ambitious canal scheme (a familiar phrase here in Ireland). In 1793 the Ellesmere Canal Act was passed, its purpose to allow for the building of a canal that would join the River Severn at Shrewsbury in Shropshire to the Dee at Chester. From there the navigation would continue to the Mersey and what would become the industrial town of Ellesmere Port. There would be branches to the limestone quarries of Llanymynech and the market town of Whitchurch, enabling the transport of agricultural goods from Shropshire and coal and iron from Denbighshire.

As with so many canal schemes of that era, it ran out of money. The section joining Chester to Ellesmere Port was constructed, as was the branch to Llanymynech, important for limestone, and much of the section towards Whitchurch, but that's where it all got a bit sticky. Plans were changed, whole sections abandoned. In the end the Whitchurch branch was extended to Hurlleston where it met the Chester Canal, and a new source of water being required, a navigable feeder was constructed to take water from the River Dee at the Horseshoe Falls near Llangollen. The astonishing Pontcysyllte Aqueduct is part of this waterway.

The Ellesmere Canal was rebranded by British Waterways as the Llangollen Canal in the 1980s with an eye on the tourist trade. It seems name changes are all the rage – British Waterways itself has now been



From the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct

rebranded the Canal & River Trust with its own snappy slogan: 'keeping people, nature and history connected'. Amazing how organisations believe putting Trust in the title makes you trust them.

PRONOUNCING PONTCYSYLLTE

The Aqueduct was built, like so many engineering structures in that area, by Thomas Telford. It's 307 m long, 3.4 m wide and, (gulp), 38 m above the Dee and is, of course, terrifying to those of us with the inexplicable urge to throw ourselves off balconies and cliffs. Joe and I came to it on bicycles, having taken the towpath from Llangollen on Christmas afternoon, passing cheerful people with pink faces walking off their lunch. At Trevor (Trefor), the village at the Llangollen side of the aqueduct, the canal becomes briefly two-pronged – the Trevor Wharves. A tidy fleet of narrowboats cuddled together, available for hire for a day or longer. Beyond them was the aqueduct.

Joe and I stood looking across this airy expanse and tried to work out how to pronounce Pontcysyllte. The Pont bit was easy, but then? A few weeks later we had a Welsh friend staying and asked him for a lesson (thank you Gareth). He consulted a native Welsh speaker to check his own, South Wales pronunciation. It goes something like this: pont-cu-su-(back of the throat noise)-tu. That's cu as in cup, su as in sup, tu as in tup (this is sheep country after all). Double el is as tricky to explain as it is to say, though Irish speakers would have less bother than English.

Did we walk across the aqueduct? It looked easier from



The Llangollen Canal narrows



Llangollen and the River Dee



Trip boats and tea rooms on the Llangollen Canal

the Trefor end, the drop being less sudden, but we had no courage-forming Christmas lunch inside us. We walked across for ooh, several metres, before our nerves failed. So we tried out our different pronunciations of Pontcysyllte again before hopping on the bikes back to Llangollen (two double els!).

LLANGOLLEN TO THE HORSESHOE FALLS

Between Trefor and Llangollen the cut has serious one-boat-only

sections – it is, after all just a navigable feeder. These extra-narrow bits tend to occur on the broadest bends. Signs advise crew to check ahead before advancing further. I certainly wouldn't fancy trying to reverse a narrowboat all the way back to the passing place.

At Llangollen is another wharf, and beyond that a marina, the end of navigation for ordinary narrowboats. British Waterwa...sorry, the Canal &

River Trust, maintains a gravel shoal just beyond the marina to prevent over-zealous narrowboaters trying for the last leg to the Horseshoe Falls. However, you can continue by boat as long as you have a horse pulling it – shallow-drafted trip boats will take you to the Falls, one hour there and one hour back.

There was no sign of horses at this time of year, but I was there briefly in the summer. Three trusty steeds watched from the half-doors of their stables beside the towpath, the boats tied up beside them.

You can follow my blog at floatingboater.blogspot.com

Photos: Nicki Griffin



Under the bridge from Trefor to Llangollen

THE SOUND OF MUSIC



This March sees a magnificent concert take place in memory of long-time IWAI member Reggie Redmond. The concert, by Musici Ireland, is being held in aid of St Luke's Hospital.

Reggie, a member of IWAI since 1972, was treasurer of the association from 1993 to 2003. He and his boat Crannagh were a familiar sight all over our connected inland waterways. He died in April of last year after a short illness.

St Luke's Hospital in Rathgar is a radiation oncology hospital with

a reputation for excellence as an extraordinarily caring cancer hospital in beautiful surroundings.

Reggie was on the board of the hospital for 36 years (and Chair for 11 of those years) and then on the committee of the Friends of St Luke's right up to the time of his death. He worked very hard for the hospital and it was a cause that was very dear to his heart.

Musici Ireland is a professional chamber music ensemble formed in early 2012 by artistic director and principal violist Beth McNinch. The members of Musici Ireland all come with a formidable wealth of experience, including international soloists, chamber musicians and orchestral members.

The concert is on Thursday 20th March at 7.30pm in the Gleeson Theatre, Kevin Street, Dublin. Tickets are €20, available from www.friendsofstlukes.ie. You may also pay cash on the night.

Maeve Kelly

BEAUTIFUL MUSIC



MUSICI IRELAND CONCERT

Thursday 20th March at 7.30pm
Gleeson Theatre, Kevin Street, Dublin

in memory of **Reggie Redmond** and in aid of **THE FRIENDS OF ST LUKE'S Cancer Care**



Guest Director and Soloist: Helena Wood (Newly appointed concertmaster of the RTE National Symphony Orchestra)

Tickets **€20**

available at the door on the night, or from www.friendsofstlukes.ie

www.musici.ie

PROGRAMME

- Liam Bates "Vivo"
- Vivaldi "Tempesta di Mare"
- Grieg "Holberg Suite"
- Britten "Simple Symphony"
- Hellet "St. Paul's Suite"

RAFFLE PRIZES TO INCLUDE: A private concert by Musici Ireland. A piece of bespoke handmade furniture up to the value of €500. A watercolour painting by artist Ian McNinch. Full day's deep sea fishing trip for 10 people worth €650.