

PRESS RELEASE

Issued: 19 January 2022

ANDERTON BOAT LIFT HOSTS BEHIND-THE-SCENES PUBLIC OPEN WEEKEND (February 26 and 27)

The Canal & River Trust invites people to go behind-the-scenes of Britain's first boat lift, Anderton Boat Lift, Cheshire's historic Cathedral of Canals, at a special free open weekend on Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 February.



Canal & River Trust

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Patron: H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. Canal & River Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales with company number 7807276 and registered charity number 1146792, registered office address: National Waterways Museum, Ellesmere Port.

Visitors will be given unique access and insight into the Victorian boat lift's complex mechanism, including a chance to view work to replace the gate seals on one of the caissons - the giant tanks which transport boats up and down the lift.

Engineers from the waterways and wellbeing charity will shine a light on the challenge of keeping the lift in good working order and reveal plans for a major upgrade and repair project which is in the pipeline for 2023/24. Visitors will be able to choose from a range of activities, including Let's Fish angling taster sessions, Let's Paddle canoeing, walking tours, children's Lego and a chance to get a stunning bird's eye view from the top of the lift.



This open weekend marks the start of a special celebration year for Anderton Boat Lift, which was reopened 20 years ago after a major restoration. Originally constructed in 1875 to connect the Trent & Mersey Canal with the River Weaver Navigation 50 feet below, the boat lift operated for just over 100 years before it was closed in 1983 due to safety concerns caused by extensive corrosion.

More than £7 million was raised to fund a major restoration and the boat lift started operating again on 26 March 2002. Since then it has attracted thousands of visitors to Northwich to marvel at the incredible Scheduled Monument and enjoy a trip aboard the Edwin Clark boat, named after the lift's designer. A similar fund is likely to be needed to undertake the forthcoming renewal and repair works.

Daniel Greenhalgh, North West director with the Canal & River Trust, said: “We are delighted to host two special behind-the-scenes open days at Anderton this February – our first in the region since the Covid pandemic.

“They will provide visitors with a chance to get close and personal to the lift in a way that is not possible on a normal boat trip. During the tour, we will also be sharing news of a major refurbishment. The black iron structure needs repainting, the control system upgrading and the hydraulic ram cylinders, which support the two caissons, potentially need remedial work.

“The Trust is awaiting specialist engineering reports to guide exactly what needs to be done, in the least obtrusive way. A comprehensive timetable and schedule of works are currently being prepared, which are also likely to include proposals for updating the visitor centre, new interpretation, re-landscaping, new learning play area, community engagement and a green ‘village’ to replace the temporary marquee, which will house visitor facilities for schools, events, conferences, weddings, exhibitions and crafts. Work on the project is likely to start in the winter of 2023/24 and could take up to three years to deliver.

“It is an exciting period for the lift and the Trust is currently working with the National Lottery Heritage Fund on a major funding bid to potentially cover some of the significant investment needed to preserve Britain’s first boat lift as a living, operational structure.”

Entrance to the Anderton Boat Lift open day, visitor centre and café are free but certain activities, like Let’s Fish and Let’s Paddle taster sessions, need to be booked in advance. Booking opens on 7 February. For more information, please go to <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/events/2022-02-26-open-day-at-anderton-boat-lift>

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Notes to Editors

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people’s lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

History of the Anderton Boat Lift

1875. Anderton Boat Lift was opened in 1875 to connect the Trent & Mersey Canal, and routes to the Potteries, with the River Weaver Navigation, which links into the River Mersey and the Port of Liverpool. It replaced the need for extensive warehousing, three double inclined planes and four salt chutes at Anderton Basin and provided easy passage from one waterway to another without the need to transfer goods between boats.

Hydraulic engineer Edwin Clark was commissioned to design the lift and he created an impressive cast iron frame, encasing two counter balanced caissons, each propelled from below by a giant hydraulic ram or cylinder. However the use of salty river water as a hydraulic fluid caused major corrosion problems and in the 1880s and 90s the lift was out of action on a number of occasions for repairs.

1908. Eventually the Weaver Navigation Trustees decided to replace the hydraulic rams with electric motors and a system of counter weights and overhead pulleys that would allow the caissons to operate independently of one another. Construction work was carried out around the busy boat lift and the new super structure eventually opened in 1908, with the loss of only 49 operating days.

The Boat Lift then continued to operate successfully for another six decades, with the aid of regular repairs and replacement of the wire ropes. Commercial traffic on the waterways declined during the 1950s and 60s, and in 1983 extensive corrosion was uncovered during repainting. The lift was declared structurally unsound and closed.

2002. After consultation with English Heritage, it was decided to restore Anderton Boat Lift to hydraulic operation again, using specialist hydraulic oil. The counter weights were removed and rearranged in the grounds as a maze for visitors to enjoy. The restoration took two years to complete and Anderton Boat Lift re-opened as a visitor attraction on Tuesday 26 March 2002, complete with a new glass-topped trip boat, the Edwin Clark, to offer sight-seeing trips through the lift and along the river. A new visitor centre was then constructed and the whole visitor destination was officially opened the following spring by HRH The Prince of Wales on 28 April 2003.