



Canal &
River Trust

Making life better by water

Transforming canals through gifts in Wills

Half a million thank yous

Welcome to our Gifts in Wills Impact Report 2023/24. Inside, we're delighted to show you where and how we use gifts in Wills to keep canals alive. In the last year alone, gifts in Wills contributed an incredible half a million pounds to our work, helping to maintain canals, protect our heritage and give nature a home.

The majority of our supporters left gifts to be spent wherever it was needed most, which we still track every penny of. In a small number of cases, we've used gifts to enhance specific canals that have meant a great deal to our generous supporters.



£476,750

generously given through
gifts in Wills in 2023/24

67%

given to spend where the need is greatest

33%

given to spend on specific projects

54%

spent on maintaining and
protecting our canals

31%

spent on projects caring
for nature and wildlife

15%

spent on projects restoring
industrial heritage



For legacies that last

Legacies support an amazing array of work on our canals; from restoring heritage boats to maintaining historic canal bridges or protecting the future of canalside woods and wildlife. And because we track every penny we spend; this map shows you where we've used amazing gifts in Wills over the past 12 months. Follow the page numbers to read more about each story.

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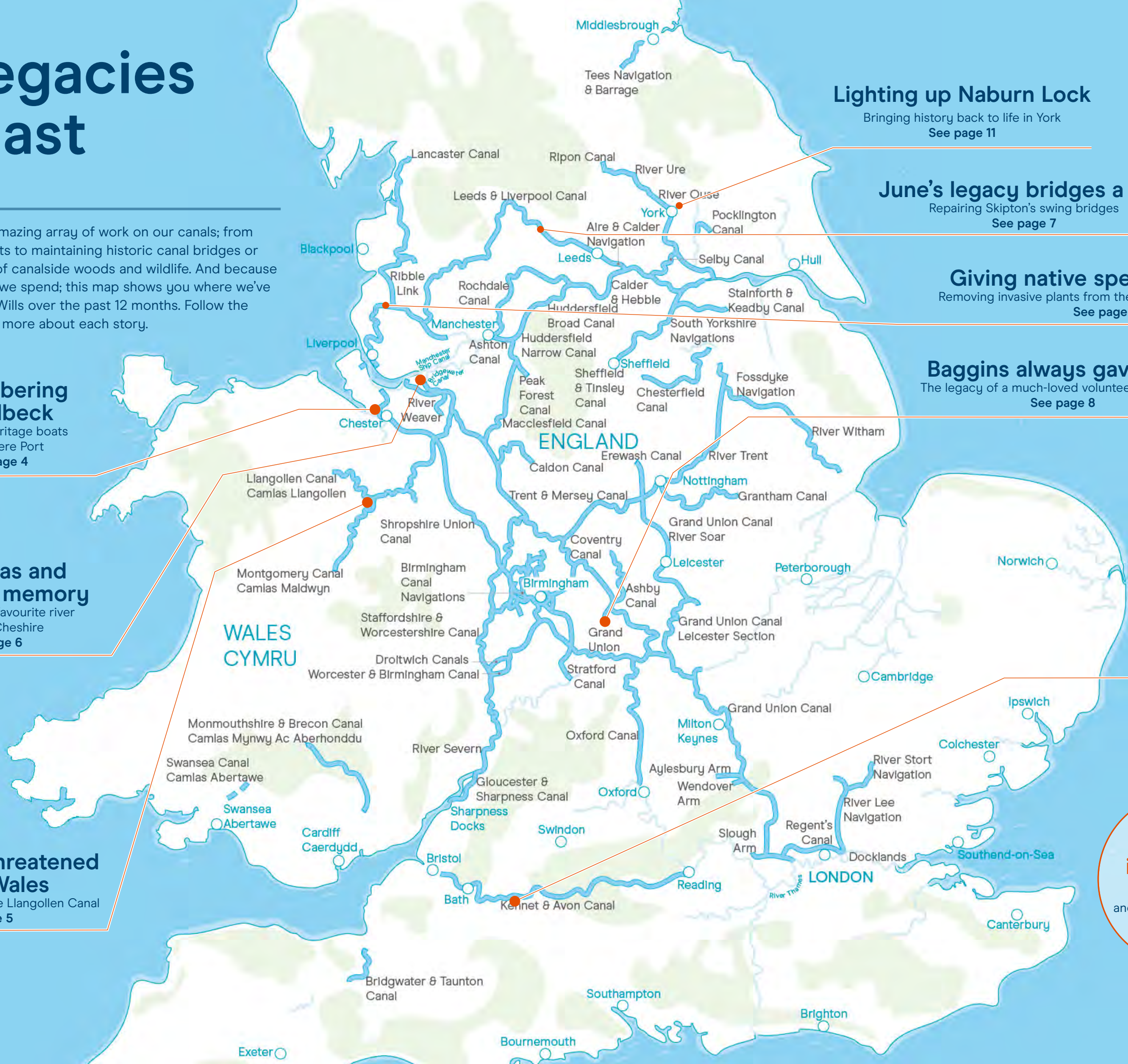
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Remembering Di Skilbeck

Much-loved Di Skilbeck MBE was a leading light among many amazing volunteers at the National Waterways Museum in Ellesmere Port. Now her legacy will help to secure its future.

It all began in 1974, when Di became involved in the canal restoration effort, while still working as a teacher. In Di's own words: "I was horrified by the dilapidated state of the site. Desperate to do something, I enlisted my students in the massive and muddy project." Di always led from the front, tenaciously committing to every project. She was kind, caring and loyal, with a love of children, education, and teamwork.

One of her big passions was the heritage boat, Gifford, which she fought hard to restore and maintain. Visitors would often find Di aboard, ready to tell its story with her faithful dog, Josh, beside her. The time, effort and devotion she put into Gifford was repaid at her funeral when this same boat carried her along the canal.

A wonderful gift of £20,000 from Di's legacy will now be used to help protect heritage boats in our museum collection, along with thousands of other timeless artefacts. We have renamed our trip boat to Diana Margaret in her memory.

“

Di cared passionately about inspiring children to love canals and their history. She created awe and wonder, shared funny stories and celebrated amazing objects, with infectious enthusiasm. Our team and the museum will not be the same without her.

”

Helen Evans,
learning and skills co-ordinator



Welcoming threatened eels to Wales

Thanks to the many legacy givers who ask us to use a gift in their Will where it's needed most, we're contributing to a new project to protect critically endangered European eels in the upper reaches of the River Dee in Wales.

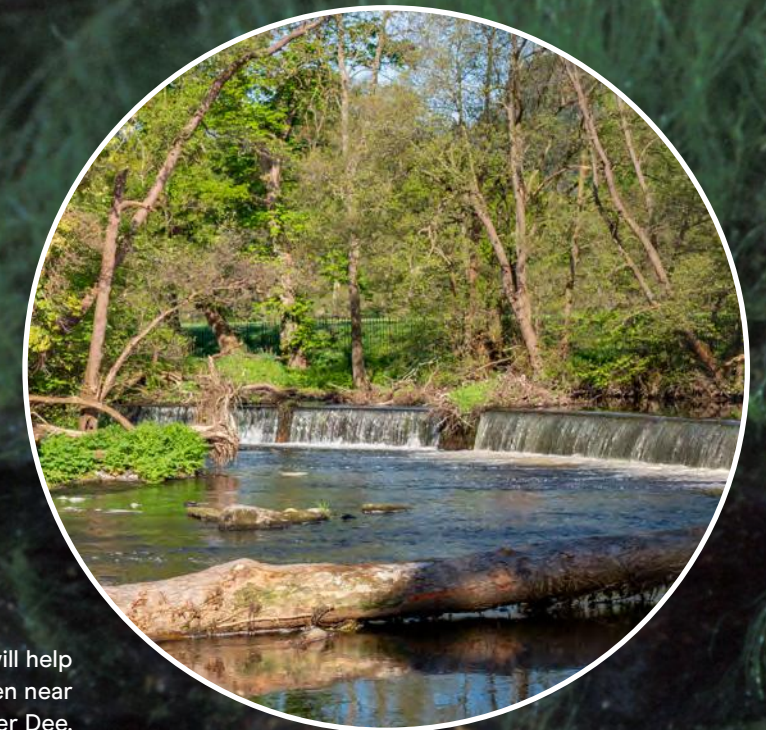
Known as elvers, the young eels make an amazing journey from the Sargasso Sea, near Bermuda, back to major UK rivers like the Dee. After about three years of swimming along the Gulf Stream, these tiny glass eels swim upriver before gradually maturing in our muddy waters. At between 8 to 18 years, they head back across the Atlantic to spawn.

But their population has declined by over 90% since the 1970s and European eels are now classed as critically endangered, meaning they are at greater risk of extinction than giant pandas and polar bears.

In Wales, we want to help more elvers make their journey safely back up the River Dee. But beyond the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct,

at Horseshoe Falls, our charity extracts water from the Dee to feed the Llangollen Canal and eventually provide water to the people of Chester. There's a danger that young or maturing eels can get stuck in this channel known as the Llantysilio Feeder.

That's why gifts in Wills will help to fund the design and installation of a screen that will prevent eels of a certain size from entering the channel. This will keep them in the River Dee where they can continue to grow, thrive and eventually return to the sea to continue the slow recovery of the species. With their long life cycle, the biggest legacy we can leave to eels is the gift of time and clear passage up our rivers. Our work isn't stopping here, the project is ongoing and we're looking at even more ways that we can help eels pass.



Soon gifts in Wills will help to install an eel screen near Horseshoe Falls on the River Dee.

In Douglas and Kathleen's memory

Two major bridges on the River Weaver have undergone vital repairs, thanks largely to nature lover, Douglas Hulme, who left a generous legacy to protect the river that meant so much to him and his beloved wife, Kathleen.

A horticulturalist by profession, Douglas had a lifelong passion for plants and wildlife. He and Kathleen would spend many happy hours walking along the River Weaver near their home, soaking up the peace, tranquillity and solitude. "They were childhood sweethearts," says close friend, Cindy. "She was his world, and they were absolutely devoted to one other."

"He was a real character," recalls Cindy, "and one of the most knowledgeable people I ever met; he knew every road, river, lake and plant name you care to mention. There was nobody else quite like him." When Kathleen sadly passed, Douglas found solace by water; strolling along the riverbank and sitting by the water's edge with his thermos, watching the world go by.

Thanks to his keen interest in engineering, Cindy thinks Douglas would have been delighted that the bridges between Winsford and Northwich, where the couple enjoyed so many walks, were resurfaced, repainted and fully restored mainly thanks to his gift. In memory of Douglas and Kathleen, a bench will also be installed on the banks of the River Weaver where they made so many happy memories together.

“
They would both be so delighted and proud that they've been able to support such an important project. They were such lovely people, and we all miss them terribly. It will be so nice to have somewhere to go to sit and remember them.
”

Cindy Southall





June's legacy bridges a gap

Like many of the gifts in Wills we gratefully receive, June Cottam's generous £45,000 gift came to us totally out of the blue. Her only request was that we use her legacy to protect the canals near her home in Skipton, North Yorkshire.

And thanks to the on-going need to maintain and repair the famous swing bridges of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, that's exactly what we did. There are many swing bridges between Skipton, Silsden and into north-western Leeds, helping farmers reach their fields in the countryside, and traffic and people cross the canal into towns, villages and suburbs.

But many of these steel structures are difficult to maintain, heavy to open or close, and subject to damage by boat or traffic strikes. The steel sometimes expands in extreme heat, so bridges can get stuck in summer. Meanwhile, wear and tear over time can mean that bearings and balancing systems can become misaligned.

That's why we invested June's legacy in repairing the Cowling Swing bridge, to get it open and working again for boaters, farmers and passers-by alike. It's down to June and her generosity that the people of Skipton and the surrounding area, can still cross from one side of their amazing canal to the other.

This repair bridged an important gap until Cowling became one of the many swing bridges that are being completely replaced along this stretch of canal. Many of these bridges were installed 50 years ago or more, and decades later they all need replacing at once, at a cost of around £350,000 each. So, the need to keep our bridges open and swinging continues to this day.



Ian Bagshaw (centre) proudly holds a Volunteer Team of the Year Award, surrounded by his fellow winners from the Coventry Canal Towpath Taskforce

Baggins always gave back

Ian Bagshaw, known affectionately as Baggins, dedicated his final years to the Canal & River Trust, clocking up an incredible 5,000 volunteering hours. Even after a lifetime of giving, he kindly remembered our charity in his Will, ensuring his beloved canal could be enjoyed for generations to come.

It all began after Ian retired. He was cycling along the Coventry Canal near his home when he spotted our local towpath taskforce. He decided to sign up, and with his incredible work ethic and infectious enthusiasm, he was soon leading the group. From there, he went on to wear many different hats for the us, volunteering as a helmsman, a towpath ranger, a volunteer leader, and manning our welcome station in Coventry Basin.

“At one point, he was doing four different roles for us,” recalls community engagement officer, Nick Cleaver, “working all hours of the day and loving it. His fellow volunteers became like a second family, and for a time, Baggins was the face of the Canal & River Trust here in Coventry.”

A plain-speaking chap with a big heart and a dry sense of humour, Ian will be sorely missed. But thanks in part to his incredible generosity, the Coventry Canal will live on for years to come. A fitting tribute to a remarkable man.

“

People like Baggins are like gold dust; he had all the time in the world and decided to dedicate it to us. Even his legacy was perhaps a thank you to the Canal & River Trust. In the last years of his life, volunteering gave him a purpose, made him feel valued, and gave him a family who cared for him.

”

Nick Cleaver,
community roots co-ordinator

Giving native species a future

As our many canal visitors will know, we battle every summer with invasive aquatic weed. It's vital to keep weeds like Floating Pennywort in check, to protect native wildlife and keep channels open for navigation. Some of this year's gifts in Wills have been directed to support this fight on two of our northern canals.

Both the Lancashire side of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal and the Chesterfield Canal are particularly susceptible to the rapid growth of Floating Pennywort, which can grow at an amazing 20cm a day through the warm summer. It's vital to spot the growth early, otherwise it quickly covers the surface of the canal, sucking all the oxygen out of the water, threatening native fish and water plants, and reducing the food available to other resident wildlife like herons and water voles.

That's why this year, gifts in Wills are helping our teams and volunteers man weed collection boats, to drag Floating Pennywort out of the water before it blocks weirs, lock paddles and side pounds. In Lancashire, the weed is safely deposited on the far side of the towpath to decompose. We check these areas beforehand to make sure birds, bats and reptiles aren't disturbed. It's a similar story on the Chesterfield Canal, where low boat traffic means the weed can quickly block the entire channel.

But there is hope of a more permanent solution. We're currently testing the introduction of weevils, which naturally feed on Floating Pennywort. Although these carefully controlled trials aren't yet conclusive, there's great hope that weevils can offer a safe, sustainable way to protect our native species, involving a lot less manpower.

We remove around

2,500 tonnes

of invasive weed from our canals each year

At an annual cost of around

£1.1million



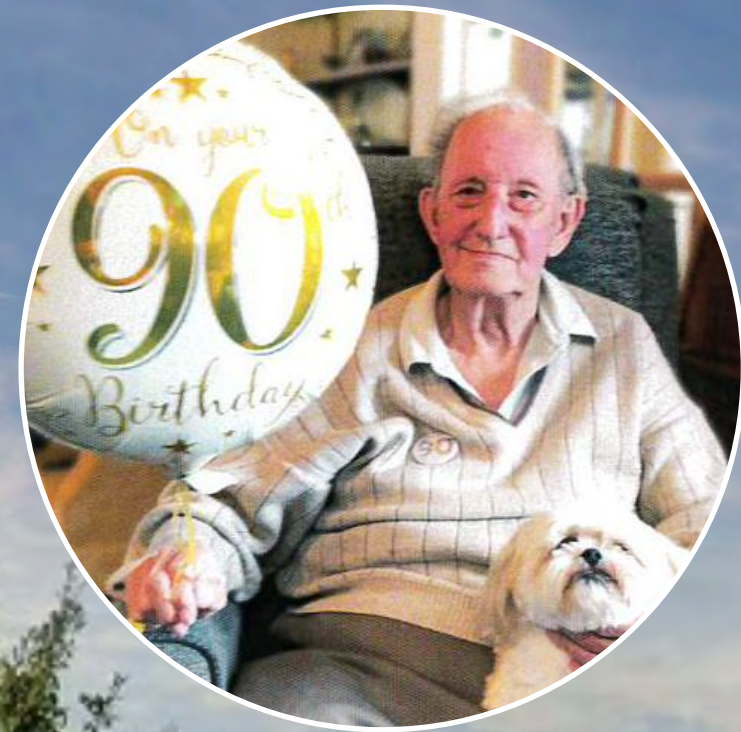
Barrie's Jubilee gift

The future of Jubilee Wood beside the Caen Hill Lock flight on the Kennet & Avon Canal is now more secure after canal enthusiast, Barrie Barrett, left a kind and generous legacy to help protect its future.

Barrie, born and bred in the nearby village of Rowde, greatly enjoyed watching 30,000 native oak, birch chestnut, cherry, and ash trees gently mature. His friend and neighbour Di Buckland, remembers: "He was a real country chap. So, we went down and helped to plant some trees. Later Barrie would go down there to give guided walks along the canal."

That's where Canal & River Trust ecologist, Laura Mullholland, got to know him, and says: "Barrie shared his collection of canal photos with our heritage adviser. And he was really enthusiastic about the tree planting. Later, after his wife passed away, we asked him if we could plant another tree in her memory. I think he was very pleased with that."

With willow sculptures, a bandstand, room for forest schools and picnic benches, the wood is already a big part of the local community. And now, just as Barrie wanted, it will continue to grow and welcome the next generation to the canalside.



“

Jubilee Wood is now full of wildlife, and Barrie's gift will help it continue to grow. We've got harvest mice, yellow and black striped wasp spiders, badgers, hedgehogs and grass snakes. There's even a colony of barbastelle bats nearby that could roost here eventually

”

Laura Mullholland,
ecologist

Lighting up Naburn Lock

11

Historic lamp posts at Naburn Locks on the River Ouse will be lit for the first time in years, thanks to Molly Brocklesby, whose generous gift will help to preserve a special piece of the industrial heritage that she admired so much.

Growing up in Doncaster, Molly always felt deeply connected to Yorkshire's rich industrial past, drawn to the raw beauty of the historic structures that adorn the region's canals. So, when it came time to choose where her gift should be spent, it was an easy decision.

"The project at Naburn Locks immediately stood out to me and my sister," says daughter, Nicki. "My mother and father both had a love of beautiful, traditional architecture and deep roots here in

Yorkshire. The lamp posts are just the sort of thing she would have fought to preserve."

With Molly's gift, we'll be able to fully restore Naburn Locks' famous old lampposts, giving them a fresh lick of paint, fixing the electrics, and getting the lights that we suspect once ran on gas working again. Thanks to Molly's kind gift in her Will, these iconic lamps, which have lit the way for working boats from as far back as the 1720s, will shine brightly once more.



“

Without the legacy money, the project wouldn't even get off the ground. Now, with Molly's generous donation, we can carry out the necessary work with the proper care, attention and specialist skills needed to restore a valuable heritage structure.

”

Kevin Young
area operations director



How to leave a gift in your Will to canals

If you've spent your life by water and want to share canals with the next generation, a gift in your Will is a wonderful way to help shape their future and celebrate everything they mean to you.

Writing a Will is one of the best things you can do to make sure your wishes are respected, your loved ones are looked after and recognise the causes you care about most.

If you want to remember our charity in your Will, we can help you write one quickly, easily and at no cost to you. After you've looked after those you care most about, every gift, large or small, is invaluable. With your support, we can make sure that our vital, but vulnerable canals stay alive and thriving in the years ahead.

We're here to help

If you have any questions at all, we'd be delighted to help. Simply contact our friendly gifts in Wills team.

Call: **07917 078121**

Email: **giftsinwills@canalrivertrust.org.uk**

Visit: **canalrivertrust.org.uk/giftsinwills**

If you've already left a gift or are planning to do so, please let us know. We'd love to thank you personally, invite you to free exclusive events near you and keep you up to date on the impact that these incredible gifts are making

Now you can see the true impact of a gift in your Will

If you have any questions about making your own Will, our friendly team will be delighted to help.

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