

Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust

The new Schoolhouse Bridge

Parade of historic vehicles marks completion

After many years of effort, and months spent by bridge contractors on the site, completion of the new Schoolhouse Bridge – the last highway blockage on the Montgomery Canal in Shropshire – was marked by a procession of historic vehicles crossing the bridge days before the road was formally opened to traffic.

Councillor Vince Hunt, Chairman of Shropshire Council, formally cut the tape to allow the vehicles to cross. He noted that the old bridge had been levelled by the highway authority fifty or sixty years before and he congratulated the volunteer team, who had spent years to get the construction to completion, and the contractors Beaver Bridges of Shrewsbury, whose work was shortly to be tested by a traction engine crossing the bridge.

At the event were a 1931 Sentinel Steam waggon, 1910 Burrell Traction engine, 1954 Citroen, 2008 Morgan 4/4 Sport, and 1979 Lomax three-wheel kit car.

Michael Limbrey, Chairman of the Restore the Montgomery Canal! appeal said, “Schoolhouse Bridge was the biggest obstruction in the Shropshire Gap, the remaining dry section of the canal in Shropshire. The bridge was always going to be a challenge to the restoration and it was difficult to see how the Canal & River Trust or the Council would rebuild it for many years. So the local canal charities got together to raise the funds for what in the end turned out to be a £1 million project funded entirely from private sources. Our appeal was supported by TV canal personalities Timothy West and Prunella Scales and we were delighted to receive donations from near and far including charitable trusts like the Tarmac Landfill Communities Fund, Inland Waterways Association and the Walker Trust. We are most grateful to them all.

“As well as the funding, our volunteer team had to arrange the engineering design and legal documentation, with many hundreds of pages needed to meet regulatory and technical requirements. The project was greatly helped by Shropshire Council and the Canal & River Trust too. Other volunteers have helped on site, some coming many miles to do so, and they will be back in the coming weeks and months to clear and landscape the site. First, they will finish a few last-minute modifications required by regulators so the highway can be reopened to traffic.

“Our canal groups are very proud of Schoolhouse Bridge, the biggest volunteer-led project in the years of restoration and a vital step in opening up the canal to the Shropshire border. Government funding is helping to revitalise the canal in Powys and our challenge is now to reopen the canal through Schoolhouse Bridge to the border at Llanymynech. After the success of the appeal for the bridge, our Restore the Montgomery Canal! appeal is now raising funds so that volunteers can continue restoring the canal channel from Crickheath where it was reopened last year. Donations to help will be welcome at <https://www.localgiving.org/appeal/montgomerycanal>.

“The restored Montgomery Canal will be a great asset for the borderland area. It is already part of popular towpath routes joining market towns and historic locations and has a remarkable collection of canal-age locks bridges and other structures. At the same time, as a byway of the national canal network it has a valuable ecology with rare and protected species which are safeguarded as part of the restoration strategy. Many revived canals across the country provide recreation and amenity, visitor attractions, protected wildlife and built heritage. The restored Montgomery Canal will bring these social, economic and environmental benefits to the mid-Wales borders.”

Michael Limbrey

Chairman of Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust and Restore the Montgomery Canal!
appeal

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