

MBL 17

Keith Tassart was born in 1940 and worked for British Waterways on the Lancaster Canal between 1962-1970 (?). Keith is accompanied by Frank Sanderson (1927) who shares historical information.

Keith and Frank have researched aspects of the canal and were allowed to visit Aldcliffe Yard, Lancaster (formally the British Waterways office) to search for canal artefacts before the building was turned into apartments.

	Keith was working in farming but found himself without a job. Whilst walking down the canal bank he was asked if he wanted a job with British Waterways. Everyone working on the canal worked on-line with a gang of workers.
1.56	(Refers to date of 92/93 but this is wrong). The canal was used to transport water down to cool the works at ICI Poulton. There was a severe winter. He was asked if he could drive a tug down the canal but the ice was 6 inches thick. They needed to keep the waterway open. A special boat with a bow to break through ice was made. They set off from Aldcliffe Rd, Lancaster. A man said that a body had come up behind the tug. A house at Aldcliffe Road was a swan mortuary. They put the body in the Infirmary.
5.58	Description of the canal which once ran from Preston to the middle of Kendal. Neither end now exists. The only locks on the section are at Crooklands.
7.17	Keith feels that the canal has ended up as it is now because of neglect. It had been a going concern when the bargees were running it. During WW2 Keith says that the bargees were surreptitiously running gunpowder. Frank – British Waterways didn't think that it was a going concern. The canal comes into limestone area and had a lot of leaks. Blasting at Holme quarry would shake the canal and cause holes. One of Keith's jobs was to take clay to Holme and fill holes.
9.32	Was there much cargo going up and down when you worked on the canal? Leisure craft were just coming on. Bargees took coal up and limestone back. 42 tonnes of coal on a barge were put on by barrow and shovel. Story: He set off from Aldcliffe and had gone over the aqueduct when a fisherman complained. They dredged that area of canal, but subsequently the fisherman thanked him for a great days fishing.
12.15	Story: They were piling in the Carnforth section. They used steel piles rather than galvanised. They had fenced off the canal (Hest Bank section) as the bank had moved. The piles were knocked in by hand. As they were dredging two old ladies saw the steam coal. Half a dozen women were picking coal out of bank. They left a quarter of tonne piece of coal out on tow path and by Monday it had all gone.
16.55	Do you remember where the coal yards were? The one at Crooklands, Wakefield Wharf, is the only one still in existence.
17.57	Do you remember any of the details of your employment? No uniform, but only thing they were told was never to wear wellingtons in case you fell in.
18.35	Story: They needed a new swing bridge at Hatletts (?), near Roebuck. They needed to get a crane down the lane to lift the swing bridge off. They put the bridge on the lighter. There were two piers at Gubberford.

	Keith ended up standing on the bottom of canal and his hat floated off. If he had been wearing wellies he wouldn't have got out. Swing bridge is still there but it's no longer used.
21.33	The basin at Kendal had gone before Keith was working on the canals. Holme was about the furthest you could navigate to. They had to keep water running but it wasn't navigable. Soon after he left they started to concrete the canal at Holme.
22.31	Story: There were places along the canal that you could dump spoil - Iron Bridge at Carnforth was one. A dredger had no front or back. There was an engine on front with a JCB and an engine on the back to drive the dredger. He was broadside with the lighter next to the dredger blocking the canal. The dredger had 4 hydraulic legs on it – one at each corner. With the legs down the boat was out of water. They went off for a brew and heard someone calling for help. A plastic boat had tried to nudge the dredger aside. They had to save the boat.
25.24	Boats at Carnforth complained that they kept catching something. They dredged up a big cable which came up like a serpent and caused the telegraph poles to move. Lucky that the cable had been cut or they might have been killed. They took the lead from the cable and took it to the scrapyard. He explains how they melted the lead.
27.39	He talks about digging out the marina at Carnforth. The canal used to be straight at this point. Instructed not to open canal up to the quarry.
28.57	Capernwray Arm. They have researched the arm. Thirty years ago, at the end of the arm were the remains of a quarry, 8 cottages and a railway. He revisited it 12 months ago in an inflatable. The canal houses had disappeared. The only thing left was one building.
34.11	Keith talks about the locks at Tewitfield. There is the remains of a building by the locks. They talk about it being originally a workman's hut. When they first went to inspect the building they found a Yorkshire range in there. The building had also been used by the canal company for fly boats for passengers between Preston-Kendal. There would be a postilion on the back of the lead horse driving the horse. He had to be a little lad to get through canal arches. No boat ever went up the locks. It took an hour and half to fill locks and so people didn't have to sit on boats, so they would disembark and walk up the locks. Another boat would be waiting at the top lock to take them on to Kendal. No boats with passengers travelled up the locks as it took too long. Recently Keith had talked to people who live by the side of canal. Now 70 the woman used to 'cadge' a lift on the boat as a child. She said that there had been a farrier in the building too. Keith talks about v shaped stones which are called squeeze stones.
42.05	Lune Aqueduct. There was once a cottage by the side of the canal which is no longer there - all this is left is a set of squeeze stones. The cottage belonged to the railway company who knocked the cottage down. The linesman who lived there was heartbroken, and he threw all of his artefacts over the side of the aqueduct. Offside of canal called the 'batter'.
45.46	Keith was coming through Penny Street bridge on a dredger with a lighter behind when they found a rifle and ammunition in the canal. They took it to Lune Aqueduct and off loaded it down the 'batter'. Frank explains the term batter.

48.01	The section inspector was off so they got a new one. They were going to drain Lune Aqueduct (perhaps for only 2 nd time since it was built). The site inspector's sons were given work, one with a digger to tip waste down batter the other on a 'dosser' (?). He couldn't use his dosser to clean mud out as the aqueduct bottom was bow shaped. The stones of the aqueduct fit together without cement.
51.05	He talks of cast iron pipe at Holme and when it had broken an engineer decided to concrete it. The Holme section leaked very badly. Keith's boat was the last one up the locks. They became unworkable. They put pipes in to get water from a-b as it was leaking so badly. The engineer broke tradition by concreting the section. It was a blessing later when Keith had to work on that section.
54.14	Keith can't remember the date he last took a boat up the locks. He thinks that he started working for British Waterways in 1962 and finished in 1970.
54.40	Frank talks historical details about the Wakefields taking the canal to the gunpowder works. Talks about gunpowder being sold to Alfred Noble. Talks about leak to tunnel.
57.26	Keith talks about how people originally walked barges through tunnels. Coming from Aldcliffe, when you get to Penny Street bridge there was an island which his supervisor asked them to shift. When he drove a stake into mud he found that it was full of pennies and ha'pennies all in cardboard tubes. They spent an hour collecting £147. They took the money into head office. Police thought it might have come from a break in at Penny Street bank. No body claimed the money. More recently he went to the Aldcliffe Yard to see if there were any artefacts. In the draw were tally coins from barges and also a small Italian coin.
1 hr 2	Frank talks of a strange stone in the field by bridge 180. They replaced setts at Crooklands. They found a large horseshoe. It used to be a stable where they would change horses on the flyboats.
1hr 5	Keith talks about old boat house in Lancaster built at an angle to the canal, so that longer barges could get in and out. After boats entered stop planks were inserted. They pumped the water out and the boat rested on broad straps. Outside was a big wheel. It was only just in use when Keith worked on canal. The building was two storeys. Winding the wheel lifted two straps and the boat up another storey. He describes how this worked. The artefacts around the building have all gone and the building has now been turned into apartments.
Break 1hr 10	Talking about visit to Aldcliffe Depot and seeing pegs for harnesses. Keith's first job on the canal was to get rid of all the horse harnesses. He talks about why he enjoyed the job. Now supermarket trollies are the main things thrown into canal but then it was mattresses.
1hr 11	Waning holes (winding holes) are where you turn a boat round. He took his weed boat into a waning hole 28 feet deep. He kept bumping against something. Someone in the yard came to look. A diver from Wigan came and said that there were three coal barges at the bottom of the canal moored side by side. Someone said they would be Hope, Faith and Charity, which were all coal barges. They got one up. One 'Faith' was brought up and subsequently used as a passenger barge on the canal,

	Hope is still down there and Charity was the one they took out. They put steel piles on Charity and it sunk, so they had to take the piles back out.
1 hr 15 12	Keith talks about coal being brought by schooner from Wigan to Hest Bank. At low water you can still see the quay. On the quay they would unload coal, take it half a mile up the road to the canal and transfer it to a canal barge. This would then travel up the canal. He talks about a building with an arch on both sides. He thinks it wasn't a house but an unloading area. Story - about slipway – Hest Bank waning hole and amphibious ducks WW2 boats cleaning off sand in the canal. Frank talks more about schooners. Frank talks about a scale for weighing cargo which was at Aldcliffe Road. This was saved and a few other things, but much was lost.
1hr 22 30	Pole in Aldcliffe yard which Keith thinks was to keep rope away from the sides of bridges. Metal pole was put across arch crossways to take rope away from stonework. It's now gone for ever. Keith explains that rope collects sandstone grit and so it's very wearing. Bridge 166 still has remains of it.
1hr 26	They explain how they were asked to go and look to see what was left at Aldcliffe Yard. They used to build lock gates there. They couldn't get much out. Hinges for lock gates were hanging on the walls.
1hr 27	Frank explains that Keith became works supervisor for the Lancaster Canal Trust and ran work parties.
1hr 28 30	Leisure craft began using the canal during Keith's employment. He talks of issues between barges and cruisers. Frank talks about the Lancaster Canal Trust and agreement for navigation rights. Keith talks about the fact that when he started everything was on the up and then things started to fall into disrepair. They found out that a motorway was being built.
1hr 32	Frank talks about the poor work of the engineers who built the Lancaster Canal.
1hr 34 30	Keith was repairing lock one at Galgate. The lock doors had worn. Talks of grooves chiselled in stonework used to close off section in a Lancaster lock. The original stonemasons have forgotten to include them so they had to ask stonemasons from Wigan to come and chisel the grooves in so that could put stop planks in. Once drained there was 7 foot of mud which had accumulated, so, it all had to be shovelled by hand. There had been a pike living in mud. He tells how the lock gates were repaired.
1hr 38 8	Talks about cutting a larch down in order to replace a lock arm - which is still there now. Keith says that the arch shape on a lock was to let the water run off – now they are square.
1hr 40	How much was he paid?
1hr 40 58	Story: talks about how he moored up his dredger on the estate side before Lancaster. In the morning he discovered that kids had filled it with water. It was difficult to get the water out. Frank talks of children moving a swing bridge in opposite direction when it was needed.
1hr 42 56	He was asked to clean out the dry dock in Ryelands. They kept hitting something with the dredger and discovered that it was an Austin 7.
1hr 44	
	Interview by Emma Aylett Summarised by Emma Aylett
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