



*“Volunteers do not necessarily have
the time; they just have the heart.”*

Elizabeth Andrews

Volunteers are an essential and valued part of our charitable Trust. The Kennet and Avon Canal is probably one of the best known waterways in the country and this would never have been possible without the contribution of our volunteers. It is down to the countless hours of volunteer effort in the past which has ranged from digging out mud to raising many thousands of pounds, providing the Trust with the means to protect, enhance and promote the rich heritage and wealth of activities that together make up the Kennet and Avon inland waterway. Even so, the demands on volunteers' time and effort on the waterway have not diminished; indeed it can be argued that the need is growing for more engagement and involvement to ensure that we can continue to enjoy the legacy of our industrial past.

This Handbook has been developed to ensure that you have a rewarding and enjoyable experience as a volunteer. The Trust is committed to supporting its volunteers and this Handbook will help you to access the support we provide. Intended to be a guide – rather than a rule book – this Handbook gives important information about the Trust and some of the different opportunities available, providing useful information about policies that might affect volunteers. The handbook is not intended to displace local advice documents used in some branches.

Above all, we hope it helps both you and the Trust to get the most out of your volunteering.

For the avoidance of doubt; this handbook does not constitute an employment contract nor is there any intention to create or imply an employment contract between the Trust and its volunteers.

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Information for Volunteers

Background

The Kennet & Avon Canal links the Thames with the River Avon and provides the only inland navigable passage from Reading to Bristol. The canal meanders for 87 miles through some of the most attractive countryside in Southern England. Built more than 200 years ago it is now a beautiful waterway featuring many locks, tunnels, fine aqueducts and pumping stations demonstrating the ingenuity of our forebears at the time of the industrial revolution. When the canal fell into disuse and was facing abandonment in the 1950s, the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust was formed to campaign for its restoration, a task fully completed in 2003. The Trust now works to Protect, Enhance and Promote the amenity on behalf of all users including walkers, cyclists, anglers, boaters and tourists. The Trust has restored and operates an original steam powered pumping station and its museum has been described as ‘the best small waterways museum’. The Trust operates 4 passenger trip boats and 3 cafes. In March 2016, the Trust took ownership of the Lady Hilda, a 62 ft narrowboat which is specially designed to provide youth/community boating and training for groups of up to 9 people. At the end of 2017, the Bruce Trust, which had been operating four widebeam wheelchair-accessible boats for almost thirty years, gave the boats to the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust on the understanding they would continue to be run as a charitable operation to benefit disabled, disadvantaged and elderly people, along with their families, friends and carers.

This section outlines the organisation of the Trust and gives an idea of the many and varied opportunities and benefits available to our volunteers. Apart from a small number of jobs which are salaried, the Trust is run and maintained wholly by volunteers. There are roughly 500 volunteers across the Trust involved with the various preservation groups, shops, museum, archives, steam engines, trip boats and Bruce boats, most of whom are very active. The Trust benefits hugely from the support of our volunteers. The sheer scale of work necessary to serve the public, run the trip boats and perform necessary repair and maintenance on our buildings, boats and pumping station would be completely unaffordable if labour costs had to be paid. Our volunteers also play a significant role in raising sufficient funds to pay for the costs of materials, which otherwise we would struggle to find.

For our volunteers, the gain is the satisfaction of being involved with our history and heritage, the comradeship that the communal spirit encourages, for some the ability to work in areas of expertise which may no longer be open professionally, and for others the opportunity to learn new skills and gain expertise in a range of volunteer roles. If you are interested in any of the volunteer opportunities described below, you should speak to your Branch Chairman or contact the Trust Administrator.

Organisation

Branches

Trust membership is divided into geographical branches. The branch network spans the waterway length with each branch management different in its focus largely because of the volunteer activities in each area. There are 6 branches with a specific geographical focus: Bath & Bristol, Bradford on Avon, Devizes, Hungerford, Newbury and Reading. In addition, the Crofton Branch runs the historic Pumping Station at Crofton, and the Bruce Branch runs the fleet of wheelchair-accessible boats and the youth boat based at Great Bedwyn. The Trust Headquarters is the Canal Centre on Devizes Wharf.

Trust Council

The Council is the governing body of the Trust. Its members (Trustees) are all volunteers, elected by the membership at the AGM. There are up to 11 trustees and they meet bi-monthly to ensure the Trust is properly managed, with its finances in good order and working on its charitable objectives.

Boats and Cafes

The Trust used to have a trading company which ran the boats and cafes; from 1st January 2025 this was absorbed back into the charity, so all activities are now run directly by the Trust. There are trip boats at from Trust Council. There are cafes at Bradford on Avon, Newbury and Aldermaston, and trip boats at Bradford on Avon, Devizes, Hungerford, Newbury and Reading. The cafes are largely run by commercial partners. and the trip boats are entirely crewed, skippered and maintained by volunteers.

Visitor Centres

Kennet and Avon Canal Museum. The K&A Canal Museum is housed in the building on the Devizes Wharf, and is managed by volunteers. It has a range of displays depicting the history of the K&A canal and also holds a larger collection of artefacts and archives in storage. It is open throughout the year for visitors and also provides organised visits for schools and other interested parties. The K&A archives are based by Caen Hill locks and managed by a small group of volunteers and are available to the public throughout the year.

Crofton. The Trust owns Crofton Pumping Station. It was built in 1807 to raise water 40 feet from Wilton Water to the summit of the canal. Crofton is famous for its two steam powered beam engines – an 1812 Boulton and Watt and an 1846 Harvey engine. The older engine is the oldest steam engine in the world still able to fulfil its original role. It has regular steaming weekends throughout the season, all managed and worked by volunteers.

Aldermaston Washhouse. This small building next to Aldermaston tea rooms has recently been restored and houses a small display about the history of the canal.

Promotion and publicity

The Trust Magazine – The Butty

The Trust publishes a members' magazine, the Butty twice a year, as well as a regular bulletin.

The Trust Website - katrust.org.uk

The Trust website promotes the waterway, the Trust and its activities. There are also websites for Crofton and for the Bruce Boats.

Twinning

The Kennet & Avon Canal Trust is twinned with Les Amis du Canal du Nivernais in Burgundy, France and the Museum of Canal and River Navigation in Battaglia Terme in Padua, Italy.

Training

Initial training

The Trust provides induction training and support for all its volunteers, to provide a general orientation on the nature and purpose of the organisation, the volunteer activity or programme for which they have been recruited, and more specifically on the purpose and requirements of the position that they are accepting.

On the job training

Volunteers may receive specific on-the-job training to provide them with the information and skills necessary to perform their volunteer assignment. We are always open to suggestions for new training possibilities and encourage our volunteers to expand their capabilities by working alongside others more experienced in a particular skill. Some of our existing volunteers are experts in specific fields and hold relevant qualifications and so volunteers who have an interest in learning a particular new skill should contact their Branch Chairman or the Trust Administrator to enquire about new training opportunities.

Providing a reference

As a volunteer with the Trust, we can provide you with a reference when you apply for paid work, study or another voluntary position. This is available up to 3 years since your last day of volunteering for us.

Policies and procedures

Volunteer policy

In keeping with other charitable trusts and as part of our obligations under Charity Commission Guidelines, the Trust has put in place several policies and procedures which are part of our volunteer support system. Many of these can be found on the Governance section of the website. Not all policies and procedures are relevant to all volunteers; this will depend on the role or activity in which you are involved. Your Branch Chair will have access to the Trust's volunteering policy and procedures and other resources that support the safe and effective management of volunteers. Please ask if you would like to see these.

Our commitment to you

While you are volunteering with the Trust we will:

- Value your contribution to our work
- Provide an induction on the work of the Trust and your volunteering role and any equipment or training necessary
- Provide you with ongoing support and feedback
- Comply with Trust policies and procedures on volunteering
- Provide you with a safe environment in which to volunteer
- Treat you fairly and with respect and consideration at all times
- Reimburse authorised and legitimate out of pocket expenses where there are receipts or similar evidence of cost to you
- Provide adequate insurance cover for you whilst carrying out your tasks approved and authorised by us
- Try to resolve in a fair and just manner any problems, complaints or difficulties that you may encounter whilst volunteering with us.

Your commitment to us

The Trust needs to maintain high standards and ensure volunteering is safe for all. As a Trust volunteer you are in a position of trust and you may be responsible for tasks that have contact with customers, supporters or members of the public. We ask you to:

- Perform your role to the best of your ability.
- Attend at the dates and times that you have agreed, and to let your manager know as soon as possible if you are unable to come.
- Assist the Trust to meet its contractual and charity commitments to run boats and open attractions by doing your best to be available when needed.

Standards for volunteers

These provide a framework to guide you in the types of behaviour required whilst volunteering for the Trust. We value your honesty and reliability and expect this high standard within your volunteering role.

The Trust requires that:

- You operate within our guidelines, procedures and standards.
- Your behaviour, attitude and language do not contradict the aims and interests of the Trust.
- You do not discriminate or use abusive or offensive behaviour
- You do not use your position or information gained inappropriately.

- You do not make statements to the media without approval from your volunteer manager
- You use the Trust's internet and IT equipment appropriately and only in relation to your volunteering activities.
- You are not under the influence of alcohol or illegal substances and you do not steal or carry out any other criminal behaviour.
- You do not accept gifts, money or vouchers from anyone.
- You do not smoke inside Trust premises and only use designated smoking areas outside
- You dress appropriately to the circumstances of the activities and tasks required.

Trust Membership

The Trust is a membership organization with nearly 2000 members who support us through a small annual subscription, receive a copy of the Butty twice a year and enjoy free entry to Crofton. All volunteers, especially those in a senior role, are encouraged to become members as this allows them to have a full voice in the running of the Trust.

Insurance Cover

The Trust has insurance protection to cover its volunteers while engaged in approved volunteering activities for the Trust. For insurance purposes, all volunteers must be formally recorded as working for us. Most volunteers use our online rostering system which records their details and activities. Supervision may be the responsibility of a nominated individual on the day, e.g. the Boat Master of the day, or a member of staff responsible for a particular area, e.g. museum curator or archives administrator. Volunteers should check with the supervisor before undertaking any new work or procedures and keep them informed of any changes or problems.

Health and safety

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) the Trust has a 'duty of care' to make sure there are systems in place to ensure the health and safety of its volunteers. We will make sure that you are in a safe and healthy environment, taking appropriate steps to reduce any risks you may face. As a volunteer, you also have responsibility for your own health and safety and that of the people you volunteer for and with. We will give you information about health and safety in your role as part of your initial training. The Trust has a written Health and Safety Policy, which can be obtained from your Branch Chair. Get in touch as soon as possible if you have any concerns about general health and safety, or if you are worried about your own role.

Risk Assessments

All Trust sites have risk assessments in place for most common jobs and your supervisor will make this available on request. This should be consulted before starting any job and the relevant risk assessment understood. If there is no risk assessment for a particular job then one must be developed, along with a method statement (if appropriate), in conjunction with the Branch Chairman or your branch Health and Safety representative, before undertaking it.

Use of Power Tools and Electrical Equipment

Special rules are in place for operating power tools and electrical equipment. In particular, there are certain pieces of equipment which can be operated only by named individuals or after specific training. Volunteers should consult someone more senior if they are unsure of the rules. It is forbidden to use portable electrical equipment anywhere which does not have a current PAT certificate. Volunteers using non-certified equipment do so entirely at their own risk.

Protective Equipment

The risk assessments will indicate where protective equipment must be worn and all volunteers will be issued with this where necessary, although volunteers are expected to provide their own working clothes and safety shoes. Volunteers are also encouraged to wear protective gear in circumstances where they feel their welfare would be improved even if these are not requirements of the risk assessments. All protective equipment must be treated with respect and stored neatly after use.

Life Jackets

Life jackets are provided for crew on all boats. Personal life jackets may only be worn if they have been purchased within the last year, or if they have been checked by an approved life jacket verifier (the Trust can organise this for your personal lifejacket if required, usually in early January).

Accident reporting

You should be aware of the importance and the legal responsibility of reporting all accidents and unsafe practices. Any volunteer having an accident whilst working for the Trust is encouraged, firstly, to seek help from another volunteer and, if necessary, request the first aid material. Self treatment is seldom the best solution. After the accident has been dealt with, the Accident Book must be completed either by the individual concerned or, if he/she is not capable for any reason, by one of those who has witnessed the accident or its treatment. You should be informed of our accident reporting procedure during your initial training but if you are unsure about whether to report an accident or how to go about this, please ask your supervisor.

Fire precautions

As a volunteer, you will be instructed and trained in your specific duties in the event of a fire.

Safeguarding

The Trust takes safeguarding of its volunteers and employees very seriously, in the widest possible sense. Any concerns should be reported immediately to the Trust Safeguarding Officer: **safeguarding@katrust.org.uk**. The Trust reserves the right to carry out a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check on any volunteer who has responsibility in their volunteer role for unaccompanied under-18s or for vulnerable adults.

Data Protection Issues

When you join the Trust as a volunteer, you are asked to provide data which includes contact information, which may include limited facts about your health. In addition, data on individuals is continuously compiled by those with responsibility for training. The 1998 Data Protection Act places obligations on those that hold the information and gives rights to those who provide it. Volunteers may fall into one or both categories.

Holders of data

All such persons should be aware of their obligations, since the consequences of failing to comply with data protection legislation could result in legal penalties being imposed. Briefly, the data held must be:

- Processed fairly, lawfully, for limited purposes and in accordance with the data subject's rights.
- Accurate, secure, adequate, relevant, and not excessive.
- Not kept for longer than is necessary.
- Not transferred elsewhere without the permission of affected individuals.

Why we hold personal data

- Data held is principally to enable contact with individual volunteers to request their availability for activities, receive general communications, calling notices for meetings, newsletters, etc. and to enable contact with next-of-kin.
- Medical records are held solely for the purpose of gaining relevant information for either other volunteers or emergency services where a volunteer has been involved in a significant medical incident.
- Training data is compiled to enable informed choices to be made when selecting staff for volunteer duties, mentoring and planning training sessions.

Individuals who have provided information

The Act gives individuals the right to be aware of, seek access to and have some control over the nature and content of information held in relation to them and to know for what reasons the information is held or processed. You are able to see data which is specific to you. If you wish to view your records you should speak to the Branch Chairman. There will be a delay in responding to ensure that data on other volunteers is excluded before being handed over.

Equality and diversity

We want to ensure that we provide equality of opportunity in all aspects of volunteering. Discrimination or harassment in any form is unacceptable. All volunteers and members of the Trust have the right to be treated fairly and without discrimination and so if you feel you are not being treated fairly, if you want to speak up for someone else or simply want more information about what this means, please let your Branch Chair know or contact the Trust management (01380 721279, office.manager@katrust.org.uk) to ask for a confidential discussion.

Purchase of equipment and supplies

The purchase of equipment and supplies for any area of the Trust is the responsibility of the management. Volunteers should always check with someone in a senior position within their Branch

before purchasing anything on behalf of the Trust. Where purchases are authorised, receipts must be produced and approved by the management before reimbursement can be provided. Volunteers may be asked to sign a receipt for any monies reimbursed.

Travel expenses

Expenses are not normally reimbursed for travelling to and from your volunteer location. This may change if a non-routine journey has been specially requested in advance and only the Branch Chairman can approve such expenses. Travel expenses incurred whilst giving talks on behalf of the Trust at clubs and societies should be reclaimed from the organisation concerned.

Eating and drinking arrangements

Generally, food is not provided for volunteers although, when open during the summer season, the cafés may provide meals and snacks at a discount under local arrangements. Each branch will have its own policy on provision and purchase of refreshments.

Gratuities and donations

Gratuities and donations are for the Trust and not for any individual volunteer. Volunteers should make customers aware that they are not permitted to accept gratuities and that visitors can donate money in The Trust donation boxes, which are positioned in the shops/cafes and on the trip boats.

Comments, suggestions, problem solving and complaints

We are constantly striving to improve our volunteer management and welcome any comments or suggestions you may wish to make. The Trust aims to achieve the highest standards in all its activities and, as a volunteer, you have the right to complain if you feel we are not meeting those standards. If you become aware of activities which you believe to be illegal or not right, you should report the matter to any senior Trust volunteer. If not satisfied with the outcome, then you can approach the Trustees. The Trust Whistleblowing Policy can be found on the Governance section of the Trust website.

If any of your questions have not been answered here, please get in touch with your Branch Chair or the Trust Administrator: admin@katrust.org.uk 01380 721279