

# Last legger Ronnie puts his feet up



RONNIE and Sheila Barnes reflect on his life underground

Words and pictures by **KEN BENNETT**

## 90-year-old has pride of place at canal event



RONNIE with a certificate from the Horseboating Society

A SPRIGHTLY 90-year-old old, whose life underground has inspired canal-lovers to follow in his footsteps, will host pride of place at a key event this weekend.

Ronnie Barnes and his wife Sheila (87) will take a slow boat to Marsden through the UK's longest, highest and deepest canal tunnel powered by a team of leggers.

Ronnie is the last remaining legger from an age when narrow boats were punted through the 3¼-mile long Stanedge Tunnel by teams of hard-working men.

Without the aid of engines or horses, they lay on their backs and, using hob-nailed boots, propelled cargoes weighting 23 tons, on arduous underground journeys lasting more than three hours.

On Saturday, the couple will be special guests of honour when the Horseboating Society, make the first journey of the year as part of a two-day event at the tunnel.

Ronnie, a one-time canal employee, used to leg the tunnel with a maintenance barge accompanied by another member of his team.

"It was a really tough job," he recalled at his Marsden home. "I have lost count of the number of journeys I legged through the tunnel.

"The only light was from a Tilley lamp and if that ever went out, you had to make the journey by touch and feel in pitch blackness.

"Some points are only 6in from the tunnel wall. And the tunnel itself is not straight so those parts needed negotiating with extra care.

"The knack was to build up speed when you were legging the very narrow parts so your momentum pushed you through the wider sections."

The barges carried stone, coal and other commodities and when the tunnel closed in 1947 Ronnie joining the maintenance crew working on the railway tunnel.

### Prisoner

One of five children, he was captured during the Second World War and escaped from a prisoner of war camp three times, finally making it back to Britain after an elusive seven-month hike across Europe to the Black Sea.

Latterly, he and his wife ran a highly successful bakery business in Marsden.

The journey runs from Diggles to Tunnel End, Marsden. The boat, Maria, will be towed to the tunnel entrance by Bilbo Baggins and is expected to be in the tunnel from 1-4 pm. There is also a guided walk for the public travelling with the horseboat over the tunnel top from 2-4pm. Other events will be staged in May and details are on the society's website at [www.horseboating.org.uk](http://www.horseboating.org.uk)

Volunteers for the events should contact Sue Day on: [sueday\\_horse@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:sueday_horse@yahoo.co.uk) or: 01457-834863, 07711-121-056.

**CHRISTIE'S**  
Join our Oldham appeal **Chronicle**

TO get help or advice in setting up a fund-raising event, contact the appeals office on 0161-446 3988, visit [www.christies.org](http://www.christies.org) or text OLDHAM CHRISTIE followed by your name and address to 07971-456824 to receive a fund-raising pack. The pack will have details on how to make sure your money goes to the Christie At Oldham Appeal. Cheques should be made payable to The Christie (Oldham Evening Chronicle). If sending cash, enclose a covering letter to say it is for the Christie At Oldham campaign.

# Radiographer Julie will head new £17m centre

THE Christie Hospital is recognised as a world-leader in cancer care, and the fact it is reaching out into Oldham will be a great boost for the borough.

It was in 1953 that the Christie got its first linear accelerator, or radiotherapy machine, which is believed to have been the first in the world to treat patients.

And it has kept that reputation for world-class expertise and equipment in the years since.

The Christie relies heavily on donations from the public to be able to carry out its work, not only in providing top-class treatment, but also in ground-breaking research in the fight against cancer.

Oldham's new £17 million radiotherapy centre will help in that battle.

It is for that reason the Evening Chronicle joined ranks with the charity in an appeal to raise £100,000 towards the cost of two radiotherapy machines — which each cost £1.3 million.

by **MARINA BERRY**

The centre, which is under construction at the Royal Oldham Hospital, will contain the latest technology currently available in the UK.

It will be headed by lead

Did you have to travel to the Christie for treatment? Tell us your story.

Contact reporter Marina Berry on 0161-633 2121 or e-mail [marinaberry@oldham-chronicle.co.uk](mailto:marinaberry@oldham-chronicle.co.uk)

Are you planning a fund-raising event? Let us know in advance so that we can cover it.

radiographer Julie Davies, who has worked at the Christie for 20 years.

She is one of the UK's leading experts in image-guided radiotherapy, which allows the radiographer to precisely locate and deliver treatment.



JULIE DAVIES, from Saddleworth, who will head Oldham's radiotherapy centre

She uses her expertise to more accurately target treatment, and consequently reduce side-effects. Julie, who lives in Saddleworth with her husband, Alan, runs training courses on image-guided radiotherapy in hospitals

throughout the country. Its use is still limited both in the UK and worldwide, but Julie's experience is second to none, having worked with it since the day it was introduced at the Christie, in 2003.