



The Basingstoke
Canal Society

Basingstoke Canal Bulletin

No. 32** JANUARY 2018



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John Pinkerton
Canal Cruises

The Basingstoke Canal – Love It, Share It, Support It

Have you been to the canal recently? So far this winter there have been some spectacular frosty mornings – an enchanting backdrop for an invigorating walk along the towpath. In this Bulletin you can find out about the many miles of fantastic walks along the Canal, as well as updates on other news.



Snow-covered Canal near Poulter's Bridge in Hampshire

But first, an update on our Friends initiative, which aims to involve the whole community in everything that goes on along the Canal. In essence, the more people who enjoy the Canal, the more it helps its future.

Our target is to get 5000 Canal Friends, these being both users of the Canal amenities, and others in the community who value the Canal. Being a Friend is FREE and you receive this regular bi-monthly Bulletin. So please encourage your family, friends and neighbours to join and support the Canal. Simply ask them to visit The Basingstoke Canal Society website (basingstoke-canal.org.uk/), click the red button (*right*) and fill in their details.



We already have 950 Friends and in two months our new [BCS Facebook page](#) has built up over 1000 Followers with regular short stories and snippets about the Canal. Moreover, social media is proving highly successful in reaching the 25–55 age group, who are known to be active users of the Canal but have been somewhat under-represented in the Society membership of recent years. The [BCS Facebook page](#) is now reaching over 5,000 people a week and the number is increasing all the time - and for those of you on Facebook you can help us reach even more people.

It's easy and can make a huge difference. All you have to do is:

- Share the [BCS Facebook page](#)
- Regularly comment on and share posts
- Like page content – all that is required is a single click

- Follow us
- Let us know about interesting things happening on the canal.

You can even leave a review. Even if you are not a Facebook user you can tell people about our page. The more you do the more we people we reach. The more people we reach the more support we can generate and the bigger the Canal community.

Boats On The Canal

The three main trip boats (*John Pinkerton II* at Odiham, *Kitty* at Woking and *Rosebud* at Mytchett) carried over 9600 passengers in 2017, the busiest year to date. *Rosebud* brought the boating year to a festive close with the enormously popular Santa Cruises (*see right*). Boat trips will start again in Spring and the full 2018 itinerary will shortly be announced. There will be more details in the March Bulletin and on the [John Pinkerton Canal Cruises website](#) soon - but they include fish and chip trips and cream teas!



The BCA's Rosebud on a Santa Cruise



The John Pinkerton II interior decoration

But work doesn't stop just because it is winter! Recently the Basingstoke Canal Society bought another workboat called *Jim Douglas*, which means that Society work parties can have a workboat located on each of the three main pounds along the Canal. It will also be particularly useful as an accommodation/welfare boat and for jobs such as clearing the overgrown vegetation on the Canal offside (ie opposite from the towpath), which is often difficult to access.

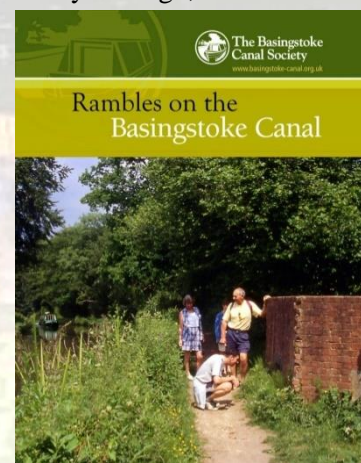
Meanwhile, the 50-passenger trip boat *John Pinkerton II* is getting a new internal coat of paint (*see left*) and will be having its hull blacked in the dry dock in March.

Walking In A Winter Wonderland

While the Canal is wonderful in all seasons, it is perhaps particularly so on a clear frosty morning as in the opening picture above - so get your walking boots on and tick off one of your New Year Resolutions!

Whether you use local maps or your mobile phone to plan your route, the Canal offers endlessly varied and captivating walking as it winds its way through Surrey and Hampshire. Although new residential areas such as Woking have sprung up since the Canal was cut some 200 years ago, it remains a tranquil haven for walkers. Indeed, little has changed since photographer Henry Taunt wrote in 1878 that "*the towing-path is a beautiful walk; grass o'ergrown and flower-laden, the hum of bees and buzz of flies lend dreamy music to the picture of still life*".

After branching unassumingly from the Wey Navigation in the East, the Basingstoke Canal rises gracefully through picturesque locks at Woodham and Sheerwater. Leaving Woking, the Canal continues its climb through the St Johns, Brookwood and Deepcut flights of locks and the impressive mile-long Deepcut Cutting, where the Canal was cut straight through a hill. Here in the Surrey section there are particularly good public transport links, handy for a one-way walk along the Canal, returning by train or bus. After the Canal Centre at Mytchett (where there is a popular café) the Canal continues on its way past biodiverse



heathlands and Farnborough airfield. At Crookham it enters rural Hampshire with its intricate network of inviting footpaths, past beauty spots such as King John's Castle and the Greywell tunnel, through forest and field to the outskirts of Basingstoke.

To help plan your walk there is a booklet called *Rambles on the Basingstoke Canal*, priced £3.50 (or £4 incl p&p) available from the Basingstoke Canal Centre at Mytchett: tel 01252 370073, or on [the Basingstoke Canal Society publications page](#). It lists 12 circular walks which have generally been planned as leisurely half-day excursions, although some are shorter walks

Do you have a favourite walk along the towpath? [Please tell us about it](#) and share your photos!

Keeping The Canal In Good Shape

The Canal is something of a 'Forth Bridge' with continuous maintenance required, often more than meets the eye. There is always a lot going on, recent activity including:

- The St John's flight of 5 locks was drained for structural inspections ...interesting to go and see empty locks (*see left*)
- Piling and towpath repairs under the bridge on Heath Vale Bridge Road in Ash Vale (*see below*) and at Ash Wharf which have been delayed by weather and are now thankfully finally complete
- As previously reported, the major landslip remedial work at



St Johns locks drained down for inspection



There was much relief when the towpath under Heath Vale Bridge Road at Ash Vale was finally repaired

Dogmersfield is now finally complete. This lengthy and complicated job cost Hampshire CC over £1m.

- The annual winter cut-back of vegetation and saplings continues along the 32 miles of canal.

Trees



Historically the Canal would not have been tree-lined, as this would have caused damage to embankments and obstructions when trees fell – but inevitably trees have grown since its construction. A tree “canopy” increases debris in the channel from leaves and fallen branches. So, the Canal Authority strives to strike a balance between removing trees for ecological and structural reasons whilst still retaining the Canal's more recent wooded character.

Tree management, which is undertaken by the BCA in accordance with the Natural England approved Conservation Management Plan, is thus

an ongoing project. A number of benefits arise from sensitive tree removal along selected stretches of the Canal (*such as is needed in the picture, above*). It allows light to re-enter the system, promoting growth and diversity of floating aquatic plants and reeds, improving the habitat for both aquatic and terrestrial species. It also creates a coppice habitat for scrub-loving species e.g. whitethroat and reed bunting. The presence of reeds along the edge of the bank protects it from possible erosion by boat wash.

On the other hand, there are also many benefits from having shaded stretches along a waterway. In fact many species require such conditions. Therefore, the overall aim of the BCA is to have a range of conditions, from open through to heavily shaded points along the Canal and a diverse age structure of mixed native trees.

Therefore, although the effects of tree management can at times look quite drastic, the long-term aim is beneficial and is to create a Canal corridor with mixed native trees with a range of ages. This will be achieved as part of a planned cycle of cutting and regrowth, and apart from emergency tree work, all of our arboricultural activities are undertaken between October and March, to avoid disturbing nesting birds and bat roosts.

Volunteers

We have a huge volunteer workforce of over 200, which is a greater concentration per mile than most other waterways. The volunteers do a fantastic job and are really good fun groups to work with. It is a very satisfying way to give something back to the community – and what better way to get some exercise!

There is a range of volunteering opportunities, with something to suit everyone, whether you fancy (for example) crewing on boats, cutting back vegetation, having a bonfire, helping in the office or actively promoting the Canal. Just contact the Canal Centre on 01252 370073, or see the [Society Volunteering page](#) for more information.



Watch a [short video](#) about volunteering on Basingstoke Canal work parties.

However, we do seriously need some extra support and expertise in two specific areas, for which we are urgently looking for individuals with the relevant skills to come forward:

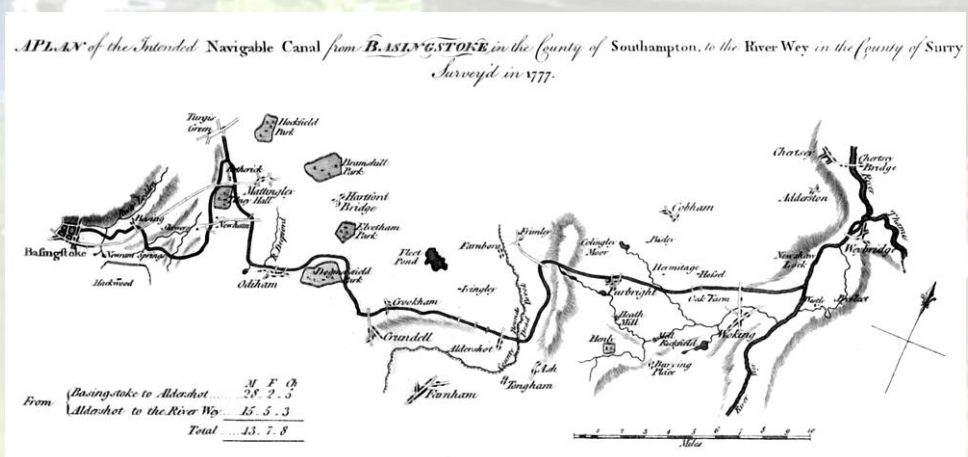
- Support of the Canal with promotions, social media, press and event planning
- Individuals with planning experience to help us work with local councils, in particular to monitor and review planning applications and developments in the vicinity of the Canal.

These roles can be done from home and need only a little of your spare time. Please contact the [Bulletin Editor](#) if you think you can help or want to find out more about these specific roles.

A Bit Of History

With all the recent financial news in the papers, it is topical to mention that when plans for the Basingstoke Canal were first drawn up in 1777, an estimate of traffic was made and £86,000 was raised on the expectation of a

7.5% return on capital. In fact only a few years later another £60,000 had to be raised as the project



cost more than planned (what's new!). As it turned out, the Canal has never made any profit nor paid out any dividend. As elsewhere, the railways soon eclipsed the Canal. Nevertheless what a wonderful legacy they have given us. Perhaps it was a great investment in the long run!

Going Forward

We hope you enjoy your Canal however you use it. Please let us have your stories or articles that you want published (send them to the [Bulletin Editor](#)). Alternatively, why not add your pictures and stories to the [BCS Facebook page](#).

Finally, please also tell your own friends and neighbours about the wonderful Basingstoke Canal and get them to join as a Friend. Just go to The Basingstoke Canal Society website (basingstoke-canal.org.uk/), and press the red button!

Best wishes for the year ahead from The Basingstoke Canal Society.

Please Note...

The Basingstoke Canal is owned by Surrey and Hampshire County Councils. They provide funding for the upkeep of the Canal, along with the six riparian (neighbouring) district councils (ie Runnymede, Woking, Guildford, Surrey Heath, Rushmoor and Hart. So whenever the opportunity arises, we ask that all Canal Friends tell their councillors how much you love and support this wonderful local amenity.

The Society strongly supports the national Canal & River Trust taking over ownership of and responsibility for the Canal in the medium term, and local councils will play an important role (through continued funding and promotion of the Canal) in making this happen. We will keep you advised of these developments.

In the meantime the more people who are aware and supportive of the Canal, for example through the Friends initiative and Facebook, the more it helps secure its future.

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