



The Basingstoke
Canal Society

Basingstoke Canal Bulletin

No. 36 SEPTEMBER 2018



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John Pinkerton
Canal Cruises

Thanks to Ellis Owen for this fabulous photo (*right*), one of fourteen winners in our 2019 Calendar competition (see below on how to buy your copy).

In this bulletin we bring you all the latest canal news including the Society volunteers' celebratory barbecue for the Queen's Award, the recent Odiham Raft Race, invasive plants, and a bit of history about King John's Castle.



It is also a pleasure to tell you that support for the canal continues to grow – thanks to your efforts we now have over 1400 Friends of the Canal and 2600 Followers on Facebook, and these numbers keep rising.

It is wonderful to see lots of people really enjoying this wonderful recreational amenity on our doorstep. However, many are unaware that it takes a huge amount of work to maintain and

safely operate the canal. Someone mentioned to me in passing that the canal 'will always be there' – but this is not necessarily the case! This takes for granted the relentless vegetation cutting, lock and other structural maintenance, water management and a thousand other tasks. Yes, the Canal Authority and the rangers do great work, but we, the community, must do our bit too.

So how can you help?
Firstly, spread the word



and get people you know to [become Canal Friends](#) or [Follow us on Facebook](#). The more supporters we have, the more influence we have with the funding authorities.

Secondly, if you have a bit of spare time, why not volunteer? It might just be a couple of hours a week but it all helps, and is good fun. Please contact us on bulletin@basingstoke-canal.org.uk to find out more about how you could help.

Basingstoke Canal Calendar 2019 – An Ideal Christmas Present

We had a fantastic response to our calendar photo competition on Facebook. The final product (*see above*) is a really fabulous collection of pictures from over 200 submitted, capturing the canal in all its glory. There is an A4-sized spread for each month (half photograph, half calendar). The monthly pictures (including front and back cover) can be found [here](#).

Priced at £6 (plus £1.26 postage) the calendars will make ideal Christmas presents. To order simply click [here](#), and then the Send Message button, and provide your name, email and postal addresses and the number required.

The Queen's Award For Voluntary Service – Time To Celebrate

You may recall that the Basingstoke Canal Society received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service this year (the equivalent of an MBE), recognizing over 50 years of work to restore the canal and keep it in fantastic shape for us all to share and enjoy.

To celebrate the award, around 150 volunteers, past and present, came to the Canal Centre in Mytchett for a barbecue laid on by the Canal Authority and Canal Society. There was food, drink and the Excel Jazzmen, but mostly it was just a wonderful gathering of the whole canal "family", with many old friends reuniting, in some cases for the first time in many years. A very enjoyable "thank you" to all those who have put so much volunteer effort into the canal throughout the years.



Around 150 Society volunteers celebrate receiving The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (click to enlarge)

In November there will be a formal ceremony when HRH The Duke of Kent will be presenting to the Society the [award trophy and certificate signed by Her Majesty the Queen](#). It is currently planned that this will take place aboard the Society's *John Pinkerton II* trip boat at Mytchett. More details to follow.

Now let's look forward to the next 50 years!

Inaugural Odiham Raft Race

On the first Sunday in September we had the first ever Odiham Raft Race. Seven teams competed over a course that started at the North Warnborough lift bridge and ended some 2km East at Colt Hill. The fastest time of just over half an hour was set by the BCA team (*below right*), thanks to the muscle power of four rangers and a cunning raft design that featured a wooden framework wrapped in layers of Clingfilm. It looked



flimsy but “Raft for Life” was very stable and inexplicably held together; well done Mark Foster, designer, builder and paddler.

Second fastest time, 47 minutes, was logged by “In Deep Ship”, just beating “BAD Idea”, the Basingstoke & Deane Canoe Club entry; the club also did a great job of providing canoe escorts for all the rafts. Fourth place went to the Galleon Marine entry “Blues & Twos” after surviving a capsizing before they had even

started. Just behind them came another two-man crew aboard the “John Sinkerton”, finishing well despite its name and a very low freeboard. Last in were the “West Street Wafers” and “Crafty Bu**ers”, who might have gone faster if their beer supply hadn’t run out.

Finally, there was a short race for children’s teams, with BAD Idea doing well again,



hotly pursued by the West Street Wafers.

A trophy for the winners and medals all round were presented by Air Chief Marshal Sir Joe French (*above*), one-time Commander-in-Chief of RAF Strike Command. A great crowd turned out to watch the fun and there seems to be plenty of support for making this an annual event. Thanks are particularly due to Odiham Parish Councillor David Stewart, whose idea it was, organisers and sponsors Arthur and Karen McCaffery of Galleon Marine, Philip Riley, Chairman of the Basingstoke Canal Society, and, not least, Fiona Shipp, the Canal Manager, for allowing the lunacy to take place!

Thanks to everyone who took part – around £500 was raised for the Canal Society to benefit the canal. For more, see the newspaper report [here](#).

Out And About

You probably won't be surprised to learn that the recent dry spell has caused some major headaches for our canal staff. You will have heard on the National news the impact that the weather had on water levels, and the Basingstoke Canal was no exception where the hot weather



and lack of rain meant that water levels were some 20cm (8") lower than normal. We haven't seen that sort of drop for a while. Thus, while we had the good news that the damaged gates at lock 18 have been repaired, the Deepcut flight had to remain closed to protect water levels. Fortunately, the St John's and Woodham lock flights remain open as they are supplied with water by our back pumping scheme.



The various trip boats on the canal have all been able to continue operating because they generally do not pass through the locks. Alongside its usual trips, our 50-passenger *John Pinkerton II* trip boat at Odiham (above) also spent a week transporting people to and from the Farnborough Airshow where it was supported by the BCA's patrol boat (left). It's not often that volunteer crews from both

the patrol boat and the *John Pinkerton* are able to collaborate since they largely operate on separate sections of the canal and have different roles. However, during the Airshow week both boats could be found moored at the wharf constructed some years ago at Runways End by the BCS volunteer work party. As in previous years, the *John Pinkerton* was chartered during trade week by a company well known in the aviation industry and this year the patrol boat volunteers were available to assist by transporting picnic tables and chairs to and from the viewing point behind the towpath and cutting back some of the vegetation.

The Farnborough week was very successful although there was a slight problem on a return journey when the propeller picked up a heavy wire net which the crew could not remove – in the end we had to bring



in professional divers to go under the boat and remove the wire (*above*) – there is a limit to what we ask volunteers to do!

Meanwhile in Woking, our trip boat *Kitty* recently hosted some very special visitors. Our boat manager, Ian Moore, saw that a group of children from Chernobyl was staying with host families under a [Friends scheme in Woking](#) and invited them on complimentary trips. He felt it would be a unique and tranquil experience for them. A couple of special charters were run for children, carers and translators, and a few of our volunteers were on the boat too.



Lunch was provided on board with gifts of canal colouring books and pens - and when they got back, local TV reporters were there to record their story! You can see the TV report [here](#).

Meanwhile, the Canal Authority's *Rosebud* at Mytchett continued to be busy all through the summer.

If you would like to book *Kitty* or *John Pinkerton* for your group or join one of our scheduled public trips, go to johnpinkerton.co.uk/booking (a few more trips are available before the end of the cruising season). For information on booking trips on *Rosebud* go [here](#).

Focus On: GoodGym Woking

GoodGym Woking helped clear up a section of the canal in August – if you have not heard of GoodGym, then let me introduce them...

They are a community of runners who combine keeping fit with doing good. They stop off on runs to do physical tasks for community organisations and to support isolated older people with social visits and odd jobs. It's a great way to get fit, meet new people and generally make the world a better place. As long as you're up for getting sweaty, everyone's welcome.



To find out more visit www.goodgym.org. GoodGym Woking operate every Wednesday throughout the year, meeting outside Woking Leisure centre at 6:45pm.

More On Invasive Species

Several non-native invasive species cause significant problems for the canal. Residents along the canal can play a crucial role in protecting it by carefully considering the types of plants they have in their gardens. Given that these homes border a nationally significant Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), choosing non-invasive and native plants could have a hugely positive impact on the canal – and on the amount of work necessary to keep the invasive species under control. Here are some that cause us the biggest headaches and how you can help:

Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*)

We have been working on this for many years. Having mapped out all of the plants on our land, the rangers carry out an annual programme of stem injection every August (the height of its growing period) in the hope of eventually killing it off. This can however take many years to achieve, so although you can still see it in some areas you will note that it is finally getting much smaller.



Unfortunately, some residents are not so persistent in their efforts and we do at times find a new outbreak. If you suspect you have Japanese knotweed in your garden contact a professional to come and remove it before the problem gets worse. Otherwise this could affect the value of your house.



Rhododendron

Although the flowers are pretty, rhododendrons grow profusely and overhang the canal channel, blocking light to the water and forcing boaters over to the side. This shading inhibits native water species, thus damaging the precious ecosystem underpinning the canal's SSSI status. Rhododendrons also make poor habitats for nesting birds as it very open and exposed to predators under its outer canopy.

The rangers tackle rhododendrons while carrying out offside vegetation cutting in the winter months (i.e. on the non-towpath side of the canal). Again our neighbours can help: while the BCA has the right to cut back overhanging vegetation as far as the water's edge, they encourage residents to manage rhododendron plants on their land, saving the canal time and money.

We will soon be doing a major cut back in Fleet, where the rhododendron is encroaching almost to the centre of the canal channel in places. The Canal

Society have been helping with this work, having cut back large sections in Frimley and we have applied for a grant to cut back almost a kilometre of rhododendron in the Dogmersfield area which will make a massive difference to light availability for other species. When we cut back we also chemically treat the stumps in an attempt to prevent re-growth.

Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*)

This plant puts on a wonderful show of colour each summer. However, the downside is its extraordinarily effective seed dispersal mechanism, in which the pods effectively explode (snap) like a firework sending seeds sailing down the canal to colonise new areas. This makes it a fast spreader and a nightmare to manage.



The best way to deal with this is good old-fashioned hand-pulling and our volunteer work parties have made very significant inroads into this species on the canal and reduced its coverage and spread. If you see any by the towpath in flower, you can help by pulling it up and leaving it on the side to die off before it spreads its seed.



Bamboo

This garden favourite is a right pest for the canal SSSI and is low in value for other wildlife. While for some it may provide a handy screen, for the canaol it invades the already narrow towpaths and its roots can destabilise its banks. We have carried out quite a bit of work in Fleet and St Johns over the last few years to reduce its growth and will be following this up with a spraying programme to prevent regrowth. Please

consider which species you are planting as some bamboo types are clump-forming rather than spreading and will have a far less negative effect on the canal.

What residents can do to help:

- Cut back any vegetation significantly overhanging the canal – usually best done in the winter.
- If you already have invasive species, manage or remove them to prevent further spread.
- Choose native species for your garden instead of non-natives.
- Get professional help to control any Japanese knotweed.
- And remember, if you live next to the SSSI you could really make a positive difference to a nationally important wildlife haven by taking these steps.

Many thanks.

A Bit Of History – Have You Visited King John's Castle?



Odiham Castle lies on the banks of the Basingstoke Canal at North Warnborough. With its surrounding defensive ditches, it was built between 1207 and 1214. The site was probably chosen by King John because he had visited the area in 1204 and it was halfway between his strongholds at Winchester and Windsor, Odiham being a good stopping place on the two-day ride between them.

Odiham Castle lies on the banks of the Basingstoke Canal, but was obviously built long before the canal existed. It took seven years to complete, had a two-storey stone keep and square moat along with raised banking and palisades. Scrolls held by the Public Record Office indicate that total expenditure amounted to £1,000, that is equivalent to £1.4m in today's money.



King John's Castle lower centre, with the Whitewater river flowing away to the upper left and the Basingstoke Canal on the lower right. The canal aqueduct over the river is clearly visible.

The Castle is particularly famous as in 1215 it was from either Odiham or [Windsor](#) that King John rode out to [Runnymede](#), where he met the barons and attached his seal to the [Magna Carta](#). However a year later Odiham Castle was captured by the French after a two-week [siege](#) during the [First Barons' War](#), the garrison of just 13 surrendering on 9 July 1216. At some point over the next nine years the keep was completely rebuilt, and the mound on which the keep sat was raised by 5 metres and an

inner moat surrounding the keep was added to the defences.

In 1238 [Simon de Montfort](#) married King John's daughter [Eleanor](#) just two years after she had been granted Odiham by her brother, [King Henry III](#). However, in 1263 De Montfort rebelled against Henry and died at the [Battle of Evesham](#) in 1265. Eleanor was exiled and the Crown took control of Odiham Castle again.

Also of historical note, Odiham Castle hosted [Parliament](#) at least once, in 1303. Additionally, King [David II of Scotland](#) was imprisoned here for 11 years in 1346. He was held under a light guard and was allowed to keep a household. Using the castle as a prison seems to have been common practice during the 13th and 14th centuries; the nearby Manor of Greywell was required to provide guards one night in three.

By the 15th century Odiham was used only as a hunting lodge, and in 1605 it was described as a ruin. In 1792 the [Basingstoke Canal](#) was built through the southern corner of the bailey, and now part of the octagonal [keep](#) and outlying earthworks are all that remain. Nonetheless it is an imposing ruin in a beautiful setting, well worth a visit. It is free to visit and there are interpretive information boards and idyllic scenery for a picnic.



Take a [drone tour over King John's Castle and surrounding area](#).

And Finally..... Let Us Have Your Stories

We're getting some great feedback that we are raising the awareness of activities and clubs along the canal. Thanks for that! As always please let us have your stories. Do you have a tale to tell or a club that you would want to mention in the bulletin? – simply send an email to me at bulletin@basingstoke-canal.org.uk.

And don't forget – if you love the canal and have a bit of time free to help us spread the word please contact us to find out more (bulletin@basingstoke-canal.org.uk).

Ken Sankey, Bulletin Editor

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