



The Basingstoke
Canal Society

Basingstoke Canal News

No. 242 Summer 2014





Editor

At our AGM, James Taylor from Surrey County Council explained the need for the BCA to increase its income in the face of economic pressures on Local Government spending. I think we can all understand this and accept that they have been forced to make unpopular decisions to push licence fees up to the level on neighbouring waterways.

Chairman's AGM report

The AGM gives us the opportunity to look back over the last year and to look forward towards the next 12 months and beyond.

I think we can all celebrate the fact that 2013 was a good year for the canal. The combination of a wet spring and effective water management by the BCA meant that the canal could remain open for the whole summer. This enabled over 100 boats to visit us from the national network. In turn this helps us to get the message across to the waterways community that the Basingstoke Canal is very much in business and welcomes visitors from other waterways. As we have often emphasized, the canal will only survive in the long term if the navigation is well used – as a former Chairman of the IWA used to say – “use it or lose it”.

Over the last 12 months I am also very pleased to report that the relationship between the Canal Society, the BCA and the County Councils has seen a considerable improvement. This has been evident in a number of ways including the use of volunteers for an increasing range of tasks including the removal of fallen trees, the operation of the weedcutter and the movement of boats. The increasing role of the Lengthsmens Scheme has also made a significant contribution to reinforcing the relationship and I would like to express my thanks to Mike Gordon for the way in which he has built on the foundations of the excellent scheme previously run by Graham Hornsey.

You will be hearing shortly from Dick King on

Cover Picture : The Byfleet Boat Club's parade of decorated boats in Woking in early May.
Photo: R Cansdale

However, some of the boat licence fee increases seem a bit startling and appear to have driven one commercial operator out of business already. That doesn't seem to make much sense as that licence income is now lost and the public have also lost a way of enjoying the canal.

Pile 'em high and sell 'em cheap was the way Tesco made their fortune and it would surely be better to generate more income by having more boats paying lower fees than killing the golden egg-laying goose by driving more boats off the canal.

It isn't easy making a living on a precarious waterway like the Basingstoke and it would be nice to think that there will be some sympathetic appreciation of the economic problems when licence fees are considered for any new operators in future.

* * * * *

It was good to hear that Surrey will be investing money in new buildings at the Canal Centre, which should make it much more able to generate extra income from things like camping. I still think that a craft centre there like Viables in Basingstoke would be a winner!

Chairman's AGM report

a very successful first year of operations with John Pinkerton II but I would just like to emphasize the huge importance of our boat in promoting the canal to the local communities and to the wider public.

I would also like to underline the very considerable mileage we obtain out of the volunteer activity on the canal which demonstrates to the other members of the Canal Partnership, in the most conspicuous way, the Canal Society's commitment to the preservation and development of the canal. I would also like to thank the team that has been undertaking the repairs to the barn. I think everyone is delighted with the result and the barn has now become an established home for our trip boat operation.

Last year also brought its setbacks. At the last AGM we were worried that the landslip at Dogmersfield would pose a long term threat to through navigation with all that would entail for the future of the commercial businesses on the canal and the attractiveness of the canal to visiting boats. Thankfully our worst fears were not realised and the canal remained open. However, a further slip occurred in January this year, following the unprecedented rainfall, and this also raised the possibility of closure. Again we were fortunate that the navigation has remained open but the further slip this year does emphasize the need to tackle these problems in a more timely way.

The way in which the serious breach on the Grand Western Canal and other breaches on the Monmouth & Brecon Canal were tackled does illustrate that major failures can be dealt with in a matter of months, not years, so we are urging Hampshire County Council to resolve its issues with the adjoining land

owners and organise the repairs this summer so the work on repairing the slip can start in the autumn.

The changes to the Society's name, the website and our presentation to the public appears to have been generally well received and I am grateful to Martin, Roger, Craig, Stuart and other members for the immense amount of background work that was needed to effect the changes. I believe that the Canal Society now presents a more modern and forward looking image which is important to us if we are to attract a younger generation to sustain our support for the canal into the future.

Looking forward to this year and beyond, I think we can be cautiously optimistic that the fortunes of the canal will continue to improve. I think BCA, with its reduced staff, are doing an excellent job in maintaining the navigation in what has been very demanding circumstances – I need only mention the fact that the BCA needed to deal with over 100 fallen trees after the January storms. Access to the canal from the River Wey has also improved under the new navigation rules and the employment of part time lock keepers will hopefully provide boat owners with a better choice of times to navigate the canal.

At previous AGMs I have commented on the governance arrangements which underpin the Canal Partnership. It remains a serious concern of ours that the current constitutional arrangements do not function very effectively. As just one example, at the last meeting of the Joint Management Committee not a single representative of the 4 Surrey district authorities was present. The canal budget also continues to suffer from continued under-funding by two of the Surrey authorities (Surrey Heath and

Runnymede). Coupled with this, Surrey County Council's contribution in this financial year will be reduced by the diversion of income from regular sources such as the fibre optic cable rental and the rent from the café at Mytchett.

Although the BCA are making real efforts to increase income from user sources (including boat owners whose annual fees have increased considerably) it will be difficult to make up the shortfalls, certainly in the short term.

This prompts me to mention, once again, a future alternative strategy for the ownership and management of the canal. A transfer to the Canal & River Trust has been mooted but, if this ever happens, it is probably some years away. I also have no doubt that the Counties are watching the development of the C&RT with interest and may see positive benefits in transferring the canal into an independent charity with all that implies for access to additional funding and the attraction of more volunteers. However, the C&RT has two sources of income which are not currently available to the Basingstoke Canal (property rents and substantial licence fees) so direct comparisons are not possible. Having said that, I would not be surprised if hear more about this subject before we meet again next year.

I have probably continued for too long but I hope I've presented you with an useful overview of last year and inspired you to view the future of the canal with confidence. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the Committee for their support and I would also like to thank you, the members, for your continuing commitment to the future of the Society and the canal that we all deeply treasure.

Philip Riley, Chairman

The Society's Annual General meeting took place, once again, at the Deepcut Village Centre with about 60 members present. It was chaired by our new presidents, Tim and Liz Dodwell.

After approval of the minutes of the last AGM, Guy Faller presented the accounts for 2013. These showed a deficit of £15,574 for the year in contrast to the profit of £60,739 in 2012, which had been largely due to a legacy. Subscription income was down because of delays in claiming Gift Aid caused by Government rule changes. The income from the Boat Companies was also down because they had spent a lot of money on the new boat and work on the Colt Hill barn and mooring. Work Party expenditure was up because of money spent on materials, which previously had been paid for by the BCA, and the work done to repair the BCA's weedcutter. Despite the deficit, Mr Faller stated that he was confident that the Society still had adequate resources to carry on its activities after paying for the barn and the new boat.

He noted that David Easter was stepping down as the auditor for the boat companies. Mr Faller proposed a new independent accountant to act for the Society and the subsidiary companies. The location of the Barnbrook Sinclair Partnership was more convenient for him, and he thanked Rutton Viccajee for their work.

In reply to a question about the Gift Aid, Mr Faller said that new rules required the submission online of extra data about each member and some software was being purchased to make the process easier and quicker in future.

The accounts and the new independent accountants were approved unanimously.

Society Accounts for 2013

Summary of accounts for year ending 31st December 2013

Income and expenditure account

| | 2013 £ | 2012 £ |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| Income | | |
| Subscriptions | 7,648 | 10,392 |
| Donations - general | 3,410 | 5,048 |
| Bequests | 1,000 | 41,156 |
| Grants received | 2,050 | 5,352 |
| Income from subsidiaries | 13,272 | 28,732 |
| 200 Club profit | 474 | 869 |
| Other fundraising income | 300 | 706 |
| Interest received | 1,325 | 5,460 |
| | <u>29,478</u> | <u>97,715</u> |
| Less expenditure | | |
| Projects and working parties | (21,184) | (8,782) |
| Newsletter | (3,460) | (5,052) |
| Postage, stationery and printing | (4,022) | (873) |
| Insurance | (4,864) | (4,735) |
| Depreciation less profit on sale of asset | (2,866) | (3,964) |
| Equipment maintenance | (1,153) | (1,745) |
| Rallies and events | (742) | (6,086) |
| Accountants' fee | (1,910) | (1,740) |
| Donations / sponsorships | (93) | (91) |
| Travel and subsistence | (42) | (423) |
| Other expenditure | (4,717) | (3,485) |
| | <u>(45,053)</u> | <u>(36,976)</u> |
| Net income | <u>(15,574)</u> | <u>60,739</u> |

Balance Sheet

| | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Fixed assets | | |
| Investment in subsidiary company | 101 | 101 |
| Freehold land & buildings | 50,412 | 50,412 |
| Plant & equipment | 5,405 | 8,272 |
| Amounts due from subsidiary company | | |
| Loans - JPCC | 148,550 | 107,150 |
| SHCC | 8,000 | 8,000 |
| Profit for year - subsidiaries | 9,672 | 9,922 |
| Other debtor | - | - |
| Cash at bank and in hand | 87,752 | 140,411 |
| Accrued expenses | (3,605) | (2,407) |
| Net assets | <u>306,287</u> | <u>321,861</u> |
| General fund | 222,453 | 238,027 |
| Restricted fund | 9,081 | 9,081 |
| Designated fund - John Pinkerton replacement fund | 71,213 | 71,213 |
| Other | 3,540 | 3,540 |
| Total funds | <u>306,287</u> | <u>321,861</u> |

Canal Society

Gareth Jones announced that he was retiring from the Committee and that no new nominations had been received. The Committee therefore would consist of Philip Riley, Freddie Dawson, Martin Leech, Guy Faller, Verna Smith, Roger Cansdale, Jeff Hill, Kevin Redway, Dick King and John Wall. This was approved by the meeting.



Above: Liz Dodwell introducing Roger Flitter.

The next item on the agenda was a talk by **Roger Flitter**, the Society's ex-dredger manager, who was now the Operations Manager of the Passenger Boat Association.

Roger gave a very interesting talk about the PBA and its work in general, as well as outlining how it had helped in getting the John Pinkerton II approved by the Maritime Costguard Agency.

Boats operated by PBA members ranged from high speed Thames Clippers carrying hundreds of passengers to the horse-drawn boat on the River Wey. The organisation had grown and it had affiliated itself to the British Marine

Federation which was able to provide technical and legal support.

One of their major activities was regulatory consultation. Roger said that the Marchioness disaster had thrown the MCA into chaos, which resulted in MSN 1823, which he described as an awful piece of legislation. It was now being reviewed and the MCA were being helpful in adopting a lot of sensible suggestions from the PBA, particularly for canal boats.

The MCA Orpington Branch had initially raised objections to some of the features of the John Pinkerton II that had been approved by the Cardiff Branch who oversaw the builders' work. The PBA had been able to help get these objections set aside in the light of the pending new regulations. They were also helping with Search & Rescue plans and exercises and establishing Rendez-Vous Points on the canal.

Roger and the PBA were warmly thanked for their help in getting round some of the ridiculous problems that had been thrown at the JPII.



The next item was the presentation of the Robin Higgs Award (*Above*). Appropriately, this went to the team that was responsible for procuring and getting the JPII into service - John Abbott,

Annual General Meeting

Peter Phillips and Nigel Bird.

A special gift was given to Peter Coxhead, who after many years was stepping down from helping organise the Chobham social evenings.



A further gift of thanks was given to Gareth Jones, the retiring Secretary.

After a short refreshment break, **James Taylor** of Surrey County Council gave a “Canal Management Perspective”.

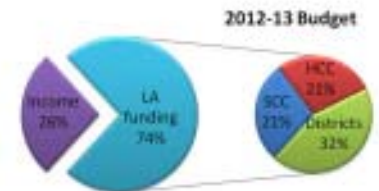
He began by saying that for the last two years he had been part of a three man management team with Phil Allen (HCC) and Fiona Shipp (BCA). Sadly, Phil was taking voluntary redundancy and would be greatly missed. James would now be the Strategic Officer for both counties, but would lose his non-canal responsibilities.

Turning to the canal, James said that Revenue Funding would become increasingly hard to come by. The canal budget was already £100,000 short of the figure recommended by the Asset Management Plan and Local Authority funding was under increasing pressure. It was very important therefore to increase the income generated by the BCA.

The Counties had spent £1.7 million of Capital

Revenue funding

- Used for running costs, general maintenance, staff wages
- BCA annual budget is approx £600k – substantially less than the Asset Management Plan suggests
- 74% comes from local authority contributions, this is under threat
- Directly generated income proportion needs to rise - rapidly



Funding on the canal in recent years on items such as one-off purchases, equipment replacement, and back-logged major works. The Counties had committed a further £2 million each over the next 2 to 3 years, but there was currently no Capital Budget beyond that.

It was clear that they would be relying on volunteer help. James highlighted the work of the lengthsmen, the work parties and the water supply research team, and said that they were delighted with the restored weedcutter.

James said that they had been forced to make unpopular decisions, such as raising boat licence fees, in order to increase revenue. However, their biggest source of income was the camp site and Surrey County Council would be investing in a new building for the Canal Centre with better facilities for campers, canoeists and visitors. A Stage 1 feasibility study had been done and architects appointed.

Looking to the future, James said that both Counties were considering possible options, such as transfer to the Canal & River Trust or another trust, but he emphasised that these were long term possibilities. In the short term the Counties were fully committed to the canal.

Canal Society

Looking back over the last year, James said that there had been some major achievements. The 100,000 cubic metres of water in Mytchett Lake were no longer the Number One Threat to public safety in Surrey thanks to the work done by contractors to reinforce the embankment. Volunteers had installed bollards to provide some very nice boat moorings.



Contractors had also repaired the brickwork of the arch of Malthouse Bridge during the winter and replaced gates on Locks 5, 14 and 15.



Above: Rob Locatelli's men installing new gates on Lock 5.

Over the winter, the Canal Rangers had had to deal with about 200 fallen trees as well as being on almost constant alert to control water levels during the storms to prevent possible overtopping and breaches. Unfortunately this had meant that plans to instal new boat moorings at the `Canal Centre had been delayed by 4 months.

Perhaps the greatest achievement was getting the canal open again last year and keeping it open throughout the dry summer thanks to the managed navigation procedures.

One other point of note was that Dr John Eaton, the canal's environmental advisor, had reviewed work by botanists and had concluded that the condition of the canal as a Site of Special Scientific Interest had improved from "Unfavourable" to "Unfavourable Improving". This was partly due to work done with a Higher Level Stewardship grant to reduce tree shading and improve bank protection.

There had been changes in the BCA staff. James Emmett had been replaced by Alex Foy. Sara Green would shortly be going on maternity leave and Steve Livesey-Bennett would be filling in for her. Mark Foster who had acted

• BCA staff

Jon & Sara Green plus one



Alex Foy

Annual General Meeting

as one of the lock keepers last year had left for a new permanent job.

Looking to the coming year, James said that a tree safety survey was to be done by boat. The Ash Embankment was to be drained down over the winter to enable the aqueduct to be inspected and a couple of leaks investigated and repuddled.

With regard to the elephant in the room, as James described the Dogmersfield bank slip, he said that the County engineers and those working for the County were coming to a consensus about a repair scheme for the towpath side and work would start in the autumn. On the offside, work was starting to remove trees and reprofile the bank.

Other work scheduled for the winter included repairs to three culverts and a couple of embankments.

James reported that the order for the water monitoring telemetry equipment had finally been placed. Other items of capital expenditure would include new pumps, stop planks, a lightweight workboat and a new head for the dredger. There was plenty to do!

James then took questions:

Q. A tree had been reported down in the King's Head winding hole but no action had been taken; why?

A. Possibly needs more than one ranger to deal with it and waiting for an opportunity.

Q. Licence fees for a canoe have more than doubled and are now more than those on the River Wey or Thames and more than the Canoe England subscription which covers all waterways. Why?

A. The BCA does in fact direct people to Canoe

England.

Q, Not enough seating along the canal for walkers. Suggest using felled trees.

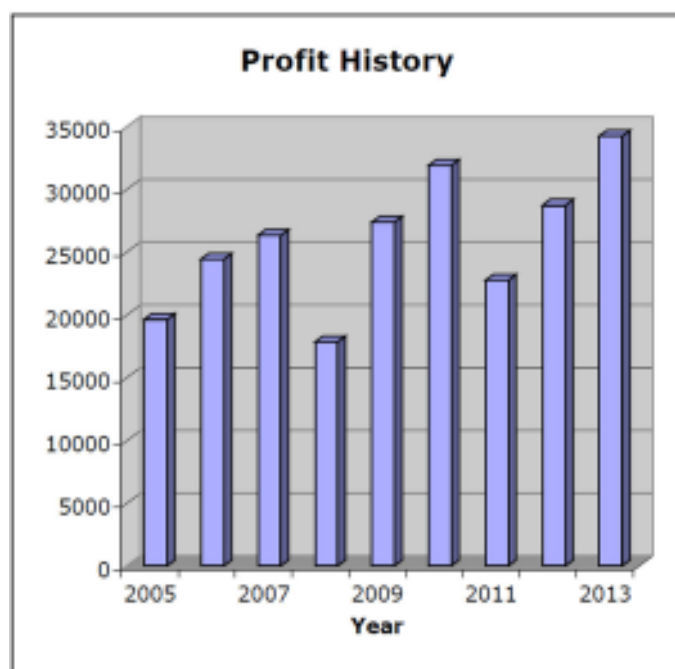
A. BCA was looking at all canal furniture and the possibility of sponsorship.

Philip Riley thanked James and remarked that people were needed to apply for grants for this sort of project. He then gave his report (*see pages 2-4*).

Dick King then reported on the trip boat activities.

The old John Pinkerton had been sold and would be leaving the canal in August, but would be doing some trips in the meantime.

The John Pinkerton II crews had been on a fast learning curve, but numbers were growing and 4 new captains had been qualified. The themed trips had proved very popular and a record operating profit of £34,388 had been made.



However, the VAT-registered Boat Company had spent £24,716 on materials for the barn

Canal Society AGM

and mooring work, and on the JP11 fit-out. The sum passed directly to the Canal Society was therefore only £9672, but VAT on the materials costs had been reclaimed by the Boat Company.

Dick thanked Nigel Bird for all his efforts as Secretary and Treasurer for some 20 years. Dick also thanked all the crews and reminded everyone about the monthly Monday members cruise; the next would be on 9th June.

The final report, on the Work Party activities by volunteers from both the Society and Waterway Recovery Group, came from **Martin Leech**. It was illustrated by dozens of slides.

It had been another busy year. Work done by the volunteers included:

- Bank clearance at Lodge Farm Bridge to Swan Bridge, West Hart, downstream from Canal Centre, plus the track to Deepcut/Lock 28
- Colt Hill Barn refurbishment
- North Warnborough lift bridge landing stage
- Work at Deepcut – Locks 27, 26 and 25 (WRG)
- BCA Weedcutter refurbishment and return to service (*Right upper*)
- Offside bank clearance at Frimley (WRG) (*Right lower*)
- Removal of felled trees at the Dogmersfield slip and log sales

Ongoing work included:

- Log cutting and disposal at the Dogmersfield slip (£900 raised so far)
- Completion of work on the Colt Hill mooring
- Rhododendron clearance on the offside at Frimley (WRG)
- Weed removal and weedcutter repair

As a final addition to the barn restoration saga, Mark Coxhead revealed that he had sent a piece of one of the oak beams, which had had to be partly replaced, to a firm that specialised in dendrochronology. This is a technique that uses the growth ring spacing in a piece of wood to determine its age by comparison with known ring patterns.

It appears that the tree from which the beam was made started growing in 1330 and was felled some time between 1401 and 1433. So part of our barn dates back to about the time of the Battle of Agincourt. What its original use was, we shall never know, nor when it was recycled, but it's a nice bit of history. *Thanks Mark.*

Phil Riley closed the AGM with thanks Verna and Freddie for the refreshments and to all the other organisers.



Events

Decorated boat parade in Woking

A flotilla of gaily decorated boats, mostly belonging to the Byfleet Boat Club, appeared in Woking at the Early May Bank Holiday to parade outside the Lightbox before heading up to the Bridge Barn for the night.



Most of them went on up the canal before appearing at the Fox & Hounds gathering the following weekend.

Below: Everyone got a prize! Liz Dodwell handing Betty and Ian Smith their goody bag.



MIKRON THEATRE VISIT

Date: Sunday 27th July 2014
Time: 7.30 pm
Venue: Fleet Football Club Clubroom,
Crookham Road, Fleet, GU51 5FA

Show: **'THE TROUPERS'**

It's 1914. British entertainment is down on its uppers. Actor-manager Lena Ashwell OBE has a theatre but no audience.

So she assembles a motley bunch of 'turns' and books a tour with a difference. For her TROUPERS won't tread the boards of Old Blighty but the muddy, bloody fields of France.

Twice nightly, we're here all week, if we're here at all!

In a little-told story of the Great War, TROUPERS brings to life the amazing Concerts At The Front - a hitherto unsung war effort that's full of guts, gusto and greasepaint.

Who better to present this story than modern day troubadours, Mikron?

Come along by car or on foot and enjoy another Mikron masterpiece. The Society always looks forward to their visit and a good attendance will be appreciated. A collection will be made on exit.

Make a diary note now so you so you do not miss the show. Bar available.

For further information contact David Millett on 01252 617364 or Verna Smith on 01252 517622 or visit www.basingstoke-canal.org.uk

Colt Hill Barn

With work on the Colt Hill barn complete, the Chairman of Hampshire County Council, Cllr Ken Thornbur was invited to unveil a plaque commemorating its restoration by the Society volunteers.



Some of them took the opportunity to try their hand at steering the boat (under the watchful eye of a crew member!)

The society's Chairman Philip Riley said:

“We were delighted to welcome Cllr Thornbur and his colleagues to celebrate the re-opening.

We are very grateful to our partner Hampshire County Council for its support in enabling us to secure the future of the barn as an important component of the infrastructure and heritage of the Canal and as an operating base for our boat, which contributes more than £30,000 each year to the funding of the canal.”

Councillor Thornbur said it was a great pleasure to see the results of so many hours of volunteering and to unveil a plaque to commemorate that work. “I congratulate all that were involved and on their improvements to what will be an increasingly valued part of Hampshire's heritage” he said.

Following the unveiling, Cllr Thornbur and the other visitors boarded the *John Pinkerton II* for a trip to Odiham castle and back (right).

Below: Cllr Stephen Gorys, Chairman of Hart DC, at the tiller.



It has been a very busy start to the year for the team running our trip boat operations.

2014 is a Farnborough Air Show year and the usual contract to take guests of one of the participating companies to the show had been received. The original plan was that this would be done by the *John Pinkerton II*, but this was put in doubt when the bank slip at Dogmersfield moved again in January leaving a very narrow passage for boats. It was deemed too risky to take the *JP II* through for fear that a further slip could leave it cut off from its base in Odiham.

The new plan was to use the old *John Pinkerton* for the Air Show trips. At 18" narrower, its chances of getting through the slip were better and there was no need to come back, because efforts to sell the boat had finally been successful.

At the beginning of March, the *JP*, Accessible Boating's *Dawn* and a Galleon Marine boat and the BCA's workboat met at Dogmersfield with a slightly worried group of people. Jim Piele went first and had no trouble getting his boat through. *Dawn* was next and got through at the third attempt after a struggle with a log on the bottom of the canal (*right*), and finally the *JP* went through without any great difficulty (*see photo on back cover*).

This was a great relief as the alternative would have been another crane-out.

The *JP* went down to the dry dock for an inspection for the prospective new owner. The word is that he intends to use the *JP* as a floating bicycle shop! Both old and new boats passed their MCA inspection and are cleared for service.

Also cleared are 4 new Captains and the crewing situation looks healthy, although new volunteers are always welcome.

It looks like being a very good year with more of the very popular themed trips planned for the *JP II*. Dick King would also like to remind everybody about the monthly Members' Trips on a Monday night; the next is on 9th June.



BC News

When we started having colour in the newsletter, two out of three pages were still in black and white to save money, which made my life as editor a bit difficult. I finally asked the printers what the extra cost of doing it all

in colour would be and was surprised to hear that it would only be £69 an issue. The Committee gave the go-ahead for the change, and this issue is the result.

I hope you like it, but I'm happy to consider any suggestions for improvement.

Roger Cansdale, Editor

Fox & Hounds Rally

The annual boat gathering at the Fox & Hounds in Fleet was moved from its usual September date to coincide with the date of the first BCBC rally.

There was a good turn-out of boats, largely thanks to the presence of the Byfleet Boat Club, but only one steam launch, *Lizzee* (below). Weather was a bit mixed but public turnout wasn't bad.



Below: Traffic jam on the Basingstoke!



Left: The immaculate Gardner engine of Rodney Wardlour's boat *Hazell Nut* that spent most of its life powering a

locomotive in a South African gold mine.

BCBC – the first 25 years ...

27th February 1989 ... that evening in a smoky back room (remember those?) of the Prince of Wales in Fleet, the Basingstoke Canal Boating Club was founded. Around 100 people turned up, much to the organisers' surprise and delight. It was agreed to adopt the name 'Boating' rather than 'Boat' to encourage boat usage rather than

Boating Club

ownership, and intending that usage should encompass any craft from a coracle to a narrow boat.

Twenty five years on we have recently celebrated at the Fox & Hounds Rally in Fleet, and it was this boat gathering first held in 1986 that was the seed that germinated and blossomed to a membership of some 200 in a few short years. Roy Mullender and Robin Grieve convinced Ron Kettle, landlord of the pub, to support the very first rally, which he most enthusiastically did and continued to support for many years.

Memorably, under the guidance of the first chairman Chris de Wet and harbourmaster Dick Elder, a large and high profile rally was held at Frimley Lodge Park in 1990 – ‘Boats Afloat’. A year later the same team organised the boating activities at the Royal Re-Opening. The Fox & Hounds event became bigger and better, with illuminated boat processions and live waterborne jazz accompaniment. And hundreds of people lining the towpath to watch. Fantastic! In its heyday, boats were moored almost all the way from the pub to Reading Road Wharf ...

Keen to see the canal actively used for boating, the Club organised highly publicised (and unauthorised!) campaign cruises through the locks in Surrey down as far as St Johns. More frequently Club boats attended ‘moving rallies’ along the canal to ensure that the public, and council tax payers, saw boats actually using the navigation. In addition the Club took boats to the Basingstoke’s twin, the Canal d’Orleans, to help raise the profile of its restoration.

Other practical help for the Basingstoke included installing water points, waterborne



Above: Chris de Wet cutting the Birthday Cake

litter and channel clearance, introduction of ‘Adopt-A-Lock’ to spruce up the locks, and the introduction of Watermate key access to slipway barriers.

In these 25 years the Club has played a valuable part in supporting the IWA and the Basingstoke Canal Society. There is a continuing and good working relationship with the Canal Authority and this has encouraged the recent introduction of easier access to the canal by boats.

So what of the future? Certainly the canal needs greater use by boats, and the Club will do its very best to encourage such. The meeting in Fleet all those years ago closed with Chris de Wet reminding those present that it was a case of “Use it ... or lose it!” That applies just as much today.

If you would like more information about the Club, please contact Jan Byrnes on 01252 676833 or email j.byrnes@hotmail.co.uk

Chris de Wet

The Dogmersfield Landslip on the Basingstoke Canal, in the autumn / winter of 2013/4, and before that in 1983 when the “Great Wall of Dogmersfield had to be built (*right*), has aroused much interest, and not a little frustration, that nature can move without any help from humankind!



Trees that once leant shade over placid, sunny water were felled across the channel or ended up leaning the other way as a result of a few moments of slip-sliding, water-lubricated soil strata.

The geological living nature of a canal is important not only in terms of what geology can offer to understanding its rock and soil structure, but also what canals have contributed to geology.

About the same time that The Basingstoke Canal was nearing completion in 1794, a young surveyor, William Smith (1769–1839), was responsible for surveying work in preparation for the construction of the Somerset Coal Canal. (*A Biographical Dictionary of Civil Engineers in Gt. Britain and Northern Ireland: p.639*).

As part of his preparation William Smith travelled widely and visited many canal schemes. He went north to Durham: and who knows, he may have visited “The Basingstoke”. He was under the supervision of Sir John Rennie, the engineer appointed for the Somerset Canal, who had also ‘suggested alterations and improvements in the London & Basingstoke Canal’ (*noted by Paul Vine in London’s Lost Route to Basingstoke: 1968 edition: p.48*).

“Excavations of the Somerset Coal Canal began in July 1795 ... and as they proceeded they revealed gently dipping strata one by one. William Smith compared the layers in one branch of the canal with those in another, and from this he worked out the order in which the strata had been laid down. He also noticed that each layer had a characteristic suite of fossils and that ‘they always succeeded one another in the same order’. This allowed William Smith to work out in detail of 23 strata that lay between the chalk and the coal measures in the area around Bath. This was an enormous advance in the new and developing ‘science of geology’. Smith produced the first-ever large-scale geological map in 1799; followed by a geological map of Bath and then, in 1815 the first geological map of the British Isles.” (*Information from “The Geology of the British Isles” by Cherry Lewis, in BBC Focus Magazine, May 2014: pages 90-91.*)

William Smith came to be known as “The Father of British Geology” ... inspired, no doubt, by the strata, soils, spoils, slips and slides of a canal.

Lengthsman Diary

Our joint venture with the RiverSearch project comes a stage further in June.

Following the March introductory presentation, we now have a date for a canal-side practical training session. Specifically designed to give us a greater understanding of the health of the canal flora and fauna, it will provide us with the skills necessary to accurately survey and report.

Points will include:

1. Basic surveying skills to highlight Water Framework Directive failings.
2. Non-native invasive species identification.
3. Hydro-morphology basics (how and why the canal behaves as it does).
4. Species monitoring.

This two hour session will equip us to add the canal survey results into the greater monitoring project already covering the Rivers Arun, Blackwater, Wey, Mole, and other Surrey and

Hants waterways.

After our training we would be looking for volunteers to survey an adopted lengths of canal four times a year, once for each season.

If you would like to attend, without obligation, you would be most welcome. All society members are invited to take part.

Details:

Two hour practical training session. (Sturdy footwear and light waterproofs recommended.) Thursday 12th June 6.30pm. Canal Centre Mytchett. Limited numbers.

Please book by email;

lengthsman@basingstoke-canal.org.uk

Further information at

www.surreywildlifetrust.org/riversearch

Mike Gordon
Lengthsman Organiser

BCA Boaters Meetings

These are now held twice a year at the beginning and end of the boating season (March/October). At these meetings the canal management team meet with representatives from the boating clubs/organisations on the canal. Unfortunately these are not open meetings. We ask that if you have anything you would like raised at the meeting that you contact the Canal Society or one of the other organisations several weeks prior to the meeting so they can consider whether the item should be raised as a possible agenda item. Your club is there to represent you.

Thanks

Fiona Shipp
Canal Manager

Blue-Green Algae warning

Concerns raised by the discovery of “Blue-Green” algae in the Hampshire section of the canal caused a brief ban by the Environment Agency on unpowered boats. This led to another unhelpful and inaccurate headline on the Narrowboat World website - “Basingstoke Canal closed”, just as boats were about to come up from the River Wey at the beginning of May.

These algae can release toxins into the water which may be harmful, though not lethal, to humans and may be more serious for smaller animals. Fiona Shipp had experience in dealing with it in one of her previous jobs and rapidly negotiated a lifting of the ban, but sent out the following practical advice to users of the canal:

Precautions

Powered boaters - Wash hands after coming into contact with water, such as after lifting mooring ropes or emptying weed hatches.

Everyone - Keep dogs out of the water. If they go in make sure they do not lick themselves and hose them down ASAP to remove the algae from their fur.

(BCA response to lady who wanted to know how to keep her dog out of the canal – Have you tried a lead?!)

Do not let dogs drink the water. (Local vets have been notified of the algal bloom)

Wash hands if you come into contact with canal water.

Unpowered boats – do not carry out rolling practice or any activities that will purposely put you under/in the water. If you capsize accidentally try not to swallow water. Shower and wash clothing as soon as possible. The algae can irritate skin particularly if it is trapped between skin and clothing. If you find any green surface scums or swirls of algae keep away from these. Do not use boats that are prone to capsizing until after the algae has gone.

Analysis of more water samples taken a couple of weeks later showed no trace of the algae and all restrictions were lifted but with a request for everyone to keep their eyes open and report any paint-like scums to the BCA.

Treasure trove?

This collection of trophies stolen from the Lakeside Club turned up in the canal at Lock 15. Sadly they were all only silver plated so the rangers did not collect. Bob Potter’s offered £5000 reward. A gang has been raiding local clubs and making off with their trophies, but they only keep the solid silver ones, dumping the rest.



Storm Fallout

With summer upon us it is hard now to remember what a horrible wet and windy winter we had earlier in the year. However, it was clearly fresh in Fiona Shipp's mind when she wrote this back in March.

Not surprisingly we have been working on emergency response over the winter months. After our term contractors finished in October we set up a contract with Kenward Groundworks to be our 24hr emergency cover. They are paid a monthly fee to be on standby, with a specified list of the equipment and manpower they have to have ready, responding within 2hrs. They were called a few times over the storms and warned that they might be getting a call out, but thankfully they were never in the end required, with our own Ranger team keeping on top of any situations that arose.

Before storms, we watch weather warnings closely and try to adjust water levels appropriately, effectively dumping water to allow for the expected overnight rainfall levels. Rangers then monitor these levels. The weirs and sluices get blocked almost as soon as they are cleared with all the debris that is washed down and it is a continual job to keep these cleared. Rangers were also out at first light as soon as it was safe and split into teams to work on adjusting sluices and water levels and then inspecting all the high risk embankments, before then heading back out to start on the highest priority trees. Logistics as always are tricky on the canal, getting the equipment we need to the right place. So clearing a tree on the canal can take anything between 1hr to several days. We had to clear over 200 trees this winter!

Our emergency systems were certainly put to the test. After each storm we had a feedback session and tried to improve our systems. Our emergency plan seemed to be getting revised

every month! The lengthsmen were amazing, helping to inspect the canal and sending in reports to help us target staff directly to high priority areas.

I am really proud of the BCA team for the way they pulled together over all the storms. Even office staff were on standby 24hrs and called out at crazy times of the morning to back up the rangers collating storm damage data and relaying it. The Rangers have muscles like tree trunks after effectively spending 3 months chainsawing up trees. Unfortunately this put us back with all the planned winter work, but we still managed to get the 3 sets of new lock gates in as planned.

Let's hope the weather is much kinder next winter!

Fiona Shipp

Below: New gates for Lock 14



Managed Navigation

Updated opening hours

Following the successful trial of “managed navigation” policy to control use of the Surrey locks last year, culminating in only the second season since restoration that the Canal stayed open throughout the Easter – October “boating season”, the Canal Management Team reviewed the numbers and concluded that there was room to employ Lock Keepers to cover some extra days with the locks open for 2014.

The Woodham and St John’s flights will now be open 4 days per week (Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday). Brookwood and Deepcut flights - which use the most water will still only be open 2 days every week - principally to allow water levels to recover. If boaters want to use the locks on any of the planned open days they need to phone the Canal Centre to confirm by 1pm the preceding working day – on the basis that if there are no boats booked in, our Lock Keepers can be doing maintenance work around the locks. After consultation with boat users we are able to offer an additional Wednesday open on Brookwood and Deepcut for journeys planned more than 7 days in advance. This is specifically to help boats based at the eastern end of the Canal.

We are losing one of our Lock Keepers this year, who is moving on to a full-time role, and with almost 7 days a week service we had planned for another member of staff anyway. Adverts will be posted at the end of April to employ two new Lock Keepers.

We hope that you all enjoy another years uninterrupted boating, and look forward to seeing all our resident boats and visitors out on the water this season.

James Taylor (SCC Countryside)

Right: James Taylor (right) taking a personal interest in managed navigation last year as he took the helm of John Dodwell’s boat *Helen* when it visited the Basingstoke.



Lookback - David Millett, VP

From Society Newsletters No.116 July 1984 and No. 117 September 1984

- The 'Grand Opening of the Hampshire-Surrey Link' had to be postponed due to ongoing leakages along the Ash Vale section, which proved to be more difficult to rectify than envisaged. This caused great disappointment because volunteers had spent many hours laying thousands of tons of gravel on three miles of towpath and undertook a lot of bank protection piling between Ash Vale and Mytchett. However the Boat Rally and ancillary event that had been organised at Ash Lock Cottage for that date went ahead and was a great success. Over 50 boats attended, including a coracle and boats of all shapes, sizes and colours ranging from steam powered craft, man powered craft, electrically propelled, diesel and petrol driven and even one under sail, plus of course the 'John Pinkerton'.
- With our late President the Earl and Countess of Onslow and their daughters on board, the 'John Pinkerton' and most of the other craft which were decorated overall cruised the length of the Ash Embankment to turn at Ash Wharf. On the way Lady Onslow disembarked to cut a tape and officially opened the new let-off weir built by Martin Smith and his team employed by the Society. This was the first Rally of Boats on the canal since the Woking Rally in 1962.
- The steam dredger 'Perseverance' is now well past Double Bridge at Dogmersfield and is well on the way towards Chequers Bridge at Crookham Village. Dredging is very heavy but both tugs are now repaired and back at work. The jib head has also been repaired and the dredger has now been repainted for its 50th birthday and new transfers applied.
- The 1984 Sponsored Walk which has recently taken place should raise around £5000 if all the money promised comes in. About a dozen other organisations should benefit by about £1,700 raised by walkers who walked for their own particular charity as well as the Society. Special mention should be made of Sir Irvine Goulding, who, at 74, walked all the way from Woking to Fleet and a Mr Fox who pushed his wife in a wheelchair.
- Due to possible serious flooding problems if the overflow weir in Aldershot Road Fleet had to be opened in an emergency, Hart District Council, acting as agents for the Thames Water Authority, decided to switch the main Fleet overflow weir to the old pumphouse site at Pyestock. The existing weir near Reading Road Bridge is to be altered to a minor overflow weir.
- The apparent mystery over the exact nature of the new canal-side leisure development above Mytchett Place Bridge has been solved. Built by Bob Potter of Lakeside Country Club fame, his latest venture opened as a pub and restaurant called 'Potters' on a three acre site purchased from the Ministry of Defence for as reputed sum off £10,000.
- A small group of members has been established to make a study of the Greywell Tunnel and the task of possibly restoring it. We are looking for a person with professional experience of soil mechanics and an electrical engineer who could advise on installation of lighting and power supplies and supervise volunteers doing the work of installation.

BCS Membership

Membership

Thank you very much to those members who paid their 2014 subscriptions promptly. Unfortunately, we still have quite a large number of members who have not yet paid the subs due on 1st March. If you have not yet paid and wish to remain a member would you kindly let me have your payment as soon as possible or advise me if you no longer wish to belong to the Society. The amounts due are shown below.

Adult £10, Family £12, Senior £5, Senior (pair) £7, Group £15

Thank you for your cooperation.

A warm welcome to the following members who have joined us in the last few months:

Santosh & Deepa Pillai
of North Warnborough
Richard Cicero of the USA
Peter Collins of Sandhurst
Geoff Gates of Stockbridge
Nick Cross of Greywell
Kevin Hutchings of Crowthorne
Ms G Lunn of Pyrford
Colin Beale of Hartley Wintney
Roger White of Woking
Tim & Cheryl Fry of Pyrford
Richard Brace of Addlestone

Doreen Hornsey
Membership Secretary

E-Mail:
Membership@basingstoke-canal.org.uk

Mowers wanted

Now that the area in front of the Colt Hill barn has been turfed, it is going to need mowing. Does anyone have a hover mower, either electric or petrol, that they no longer use, and is there anyone out there who would be willing to use it on a regular basis to keep things tidy? If so, Duncan Paine would like to hear from you.

Email duncanpaine@talktalk.net

Volunteers Needed

The Canal is already well supported by a strong team of volunteers. However the BCA is looking specifically for some volunteers to help out in the Canal Centre office. The role would involve helping to greet visitors in the centre, dealing with phone calls and enquiries and taking bookings for camping and boating.

This is a voluntary role with payment only in tea and coffee. However it is a busy and good humoured office to work in and a really good way to find out what happens behind the scenes on the Canal. There will be a requirement to use a computer, but full training will be provided.

For further information please speak to Dean Wall, the Visitor Services Manager, on 01252 370073 or contact him at

dean.wall@hants.gov.uk.

Thank you.

Fiona Shipp

BCS information



The Bulletin is now up to Issue 22.

If you want to keep up with the latest news about the canal, please send your e-mail address to

membership@basinstoke-canal.org.uk

To join the Society, please contact the Membership Secretary, Mrs Doreen Hornsey, whose contact details are below.

The annual subscription is Adults £10, Junior £3, OAP £5, Family £12, 2 OAP £7, and Group £15, payable on March 1st each year.

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John Pinkerton's escape



The Society's old trip boat squeezing through the Dogmersfield slip in early March.