

Basingstoke Canal



The last 40 years

Introduction

40 years ago the Basingstoke Canal was still privately owned and was steadily sliding into decay. The Canal Company had no substantial source of income and the owners were beginning to consider ways of getting rid of it. Thanks to the vision and efforts of local people and canal enthusiasts from all over the country, this did not happen.

This little booklet is not intended as a history of the last 40 years, but more as a celebration of what was achieved, that may bring back a few memories to those who were involved.

It is dedicated to all those who 40 years ago recognised that the Basingstoke Canal should and could be saved, to the Hampshire and Surrey County Council people who believed them and gave their support, and to the thousands of volunteers who did the job and turned the vision into reality.

Cover photo. Reading Road Wharf, Fleet, in 1967.
Below. Volunteers at Deepcut.





In the late 1960s, many parts of the canal were either dry or choked with rampant reed growth. The picture above shows the condition of the Woodham locks, later restored by volunteer groups (*below*).





The photo above shows Lock 3 at Woodham in use in the 1960s, but by 1986 it was completely derelict with rotting gates and trees growing out of the brick work (*below*).





Lock 3 was the last lock to be restored; installing a bypass channel was particularly difficult. The scene above was probably taken in 1989. The picture below shows it fully navigable again.





Restoration of the St.John's locks was kick-started by a £5000 prize won by local resident Margurite Redway in a national competition run by the SPAR grocery chain. Above, Lock 11 in 1980, below, volunteers demolishing the lower cill in the winter of 1981.





Lock 12 at Brookwood suffered from two problems - encroachment on one side by a garage and on the other by gardens. A WW2 pillbox also had to be demolished before the lock was finally restored. The photo below shows Frank Jones, who led the team, letting the first boat through.





In 1957, the gates of Lock 22 were blown up by soldiers and by the late 1960s most of the Deepcut flight of 14 locks was completely dry. The flight was the biggest challenge to the restoration of the canal. This is Lock 25 at Curzon Bridge.





Many of the Deepcut locks were restored by youngsters working on Job Creation Schemes, but volunteers also played a part, not least by operating a miniature railway to carry materials to this otherwise inaccessible area.



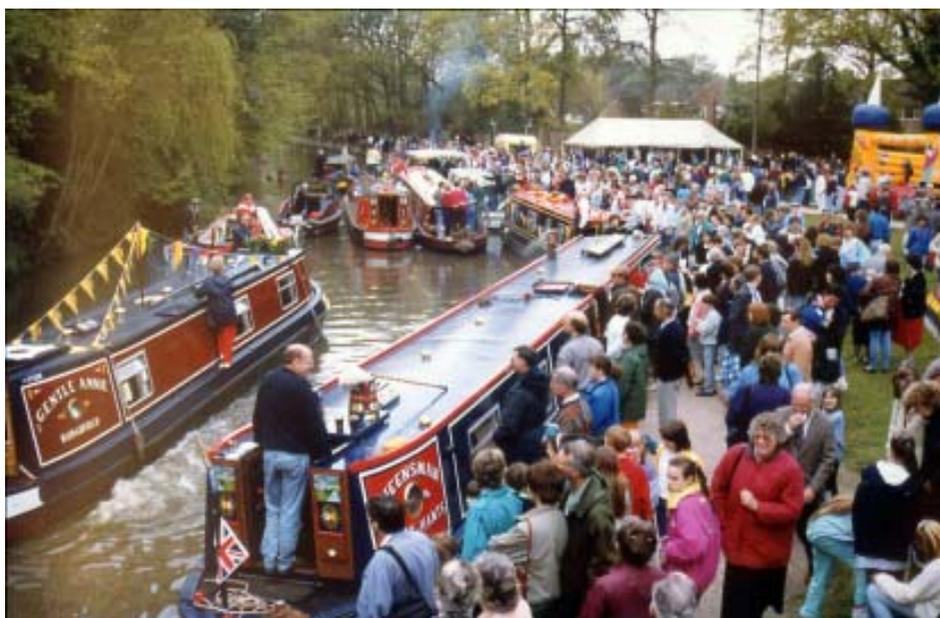


The cover photo shows Reading Road Wharf in Fleet in 1967, but only a few years later the area looked very different, with little sign of any water. An early volunteer working party cleared the bridge hole (*below*).





One of the first jobs was to clear the overgrown towpath and banks of the canal, a popular family weekend activity with lots of bonfires. On the day after the canal was re-opened on 10th May 1991, a convoy set out westward, seen below at the restored Reading Road Wharf.





While most of the canal was dry dredged using excavators, the stretch from North Warnborough to Pondtail in Fleet was dredged by a 50 year-old steam powered dredger “Perseverance”. The job started at Colt Hill in 1976(*above*). A miniature railway was used to carry away the silt (*below*).





The Canal Society later acquired a fleet of tugs and barges to remove the dredgings to the dump sites. The programme ended at Pondtail in 1993 (*below*). The dredger, last of its kind, went to the Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port but the tugs and barges are still in use for various jobs.





In 1978, with only about 1½ miles of canal dredged, the Canal Society started operating its trip boat “John Pinkerton”. Lord Montague launched it (*above*) and 13 years later on the day after the canal re-opened, it set off at 4.30am on its first voyage to the River Wey. *Below*: Deepcut at sunrise.





Above: End of a 12 hour trip and 25 years of restoration work - the “John Pinkerton” finally reaches the junction with the River Wey on 11th May 1991.

Back cover: Volunteers taking a well earned break at St.John’s in 2002.

Thanks are due to the following for use of their photos:

Margurite Redway, Dieter Jebens, Dick Snell, Tim Dodwell, Clive Durley, Roger Cansdale, and any others whose identity has been lost.

If you would like to join or know more about the Surrey & Hampshire Canal Society, phone 01252 623591 or visit the Society’s website at www.basingstoke-canal.org.uk

For current information about the canal, contact the Basingstoke Canal Authority, Canal Centre, Mytchett Place Road, Mytchett, GU16 6DD, phone 01252 370073, website www.basingstoke-canal.co.uk

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