
BASINGSTOKE CANAL



CANALSIDE JUBILEE

2nd - 4th June 2012

Souvenir Booklet
£1.50



Introduction

When Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II came to the throne in 1952, the Basingstoke Canal was still in private ownership, and was to remain so for over 20 years, gradually sliding into decline. With the virtual disappearance of all sources of income by the mid-1960s, the owners began to plan its demise at the hands of developers. At about the same time, the newly formed Surrey & Hampshire Canal Society began a campaign to get it taken into public ownership and restored to full navigation.

Surrey and Hampshire County Councils were persuaded to purchase it in the early 1970s and it is slightly startling to realise that they have now owned it for longer than any other body except the original Basingstoke Canal Company that went bankrupt in 1869.

The years up until 1991 saw the canal gradually returning to life, largely at the hands of a dedicated band of volunteers who cleared the overgrown banks, rebuilt locks and bridges, and dredged over 10 miles of it with a 50 year old steam powered dredger.



*Lock 11 in St John's, Woking,
pre-restoration in 1980*

The official re-opening in May 1991 by HRH the Duke of Kent felt like the triumphant end of a long battle, but with hindsight it can be seen as just the beginning.



In the years since then, significant steps have been taken to tackle the canal's biggest problem, lack of water, but more needs to be done and overall the condition of the canal has been slowly declining again, bringing potential risks to public safety.

Today the biggest cause for celebration is the recognition by the County Councils that money needs to be spent and that the cycles of decline and restoration that have been a feature of the canal's whole history need to stop.

Once it has been returned to a good, safe, condition, it needs to be kept like that by proper maintenance. Boaters and anglers pay licence fees, but most of the users of the canal are those who just walk, jog or cycle along the towpath for free. Local authority support for the canal from local taxes is therefore not unreasonable.

The canal is a wonderful public amenity for the area and it is up to the public to ensure that it stays that way. Tell your local councillor and, even better, join one of the volunteer work parties that are organised by the Canal Authority and the Canal Society!

Challenges and opportunities

The challenges faced today by the canal are much the same as they were 200 years ago: it doesn't have enough money coming in to keep it adequately maintained and it doesn't have enough water to keep it usable throughout the year.

To a degree these problems are interlinked. If there was enough water to enable boats use the canal at all times, more boats would come onto the canal. More licence fees and mooring fees would increase the canal's income and help to keep it in better condition.

There is a waiting list for moorings on the Wey Navigation of about 100 boats and the Wey earns 20 times more from boating than the Basingstoke Canal. This represents a huge opportunity for the canal, but the key is water. Nobody wants to bring a boat onto a canal if there is a risk that it will get stuck there!

Water shortage



*A typical scene at Deepcut
in August.*

In most years since the canal was re-opened, water levels have dropped so far by mid-summer that many of the locks have had to be closed.

A start was made in tackling the problem when Heritage Lottery Funding paid for a scheme to enable

water to be pumped from below Lock 1 up to the Woking pound. This ensures that this length of the canal can be kept navigable at all times.

A second back-pumping scheme for the five locks at St John's was installed by volunteers and opened in 2007.



Volunteers at work on the inlet chamber below Lock 7.

A similar scheme will probably cover the three Brookwood locks, but the fourteen locks at Deepcut present a major challenge and alternatives to back-pumping are being reviewed. These could include a new reservoir or a bore hole to tap underground supplies.

The water situation would be improved if losses of water could be reduced and the Canal Authority has also been tackling this aspect.



Contractors at work on the West Hart embankment in Crookham

Contractors have lined the side of the canal in several places to reduce leakage on the embankments in Hampshire.

Towpaths

The great majority of the users of the Basingstoke Canal are those who walk, jog or cycle along the towpath, which is classified as a “Permissive Footpath”. In other words pedestrians and cyclists are allowed to use it by permission of the owners, but horses are only allowed if they are pulling a boat and motor bikes are banned.

Recent years have seen significant improvements to some lengths of the towpath but decline in others. In Woking, Sustrans, the sustainable transport charity, paid for the towpath to be upgraded to allow better use by cyclists. This has improved the standard of the path enormously but has led to some problems because it is now so good that it encourages some cyclists to go rather faster than is safe for the pedestrians who share the towpath.

Sustrans towpath good for joggers as well as cyclists!



Further up the canal the story is not so good. Between Frimley Lodge Park and

Mytchett the bank has become seriously eroded making the towpath almost impassable in places. Much of this caused by dogs climbing out of the canal after being allowed to swim in it. Their claws tear away the vegetation which binds the bank together and the sandy soil begins to crumble away.

However a £25,000 windfall from a fine for an environmental offence has allowed repair work to begin. Canal Society volunteers have already spent several weekend at Frimley driving posts in to support Nicospan mesh to redefine the edge of the towpath. Once this has all been done and back-filled, the towpath will be re-surfaced.

*Canal Society
volunteers at work in
Frimley.*



Special ramps will be put in to enable dogs to exit the canal without damaging the bank. However, owners are encouraged not to allow their pets to swim in the canal because of the danger to them from the potentially fatal Weil's disease.



Canal volunteers have also re-surfaced the towpath from Norris Bridge in Fleet to Eelmoor Bridge near the end of the Farnborough runway (*Left*).

A second restoration

Canals are man-made structures. If they are not maintained, nature takes over again with frightening speed and safety issues begin to appear. Older local residents may remember the bank breach in 1968 that flooded the Farnborough airfield the day before the SBAC airshow was due to start!

The Deepcut flight of locks is particularly vulnerable because of the sandy soil that allows water to seep round the locks and erode the ground around them.

A few years ago, the Canal Authority commissioned a condition survey of the whole canal. Some quite serious defects were found and as a result the two County Councils, who own the canal, put up some £1.7 million to pay for repair work.

Contractors started work last autumn, focussing largely on the Deepcut locks. Wing walls at the entrances of the locks have been rebuilt, sheet metal piling has been installed to reduce seepage and new gates have been installed.

Wing wall repairs and piling at Lock 21.

It had been hoped that the major repairs





Replacement of the lower gates of Lock 25.

would be done in time for the flight to re-open to allow boats to come up for the

J u b i l e e

celebrations at Frimley. However, the drought conditions that prevailed in the South of England mean that there was not enough water in the canal to allow the planned visits to go ahead. The flight therefore stays closed.

However, the good news is that this will enable further work to continue. As well as work on the lock structures, some 10 sets of new lock gates will be installed in total.

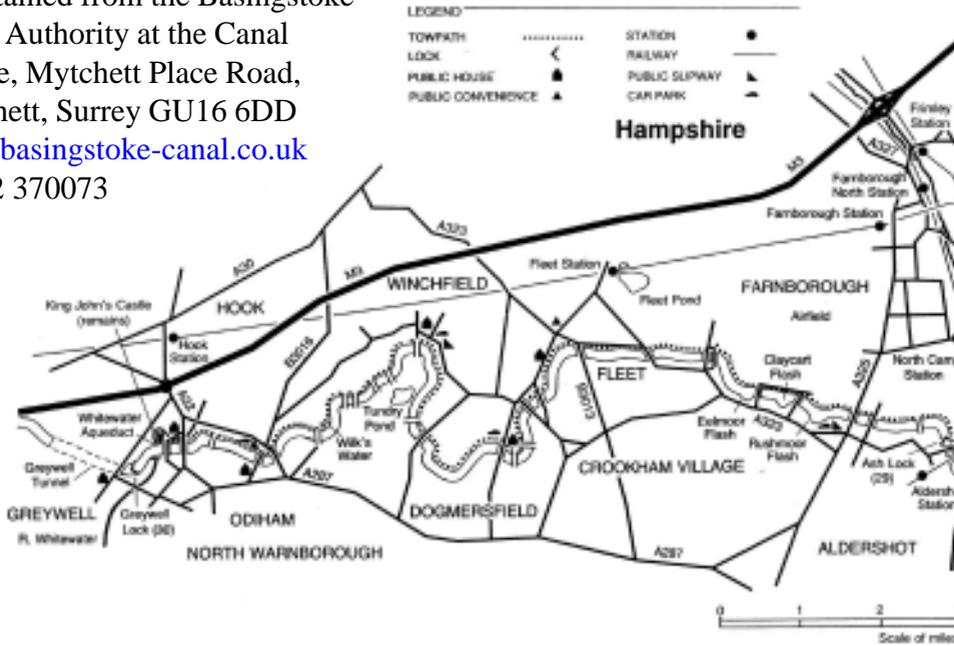
Elsewhere, grooves for stop planks are being cut in bridge holes to allow the canal to be quickly dammed in emergencies.

The Canal Rangers have been installing new paddle gear for the locks which will be safer to operate.

Much has been done and a lot remains to do, but hopefully in a couple of years time we will have a canal in really good condition that will stay open for navigation, will not pose any risk to public safety and will be a credit to the County Council owners.

Boating on the Basingstoke

Licences for private boats can be obtained from the Basingstoke Canal Authority at the Canal Centre, Mytchett Place Road, Mytchett, Surrey GU16 6DD
www.basingstoke-canal.co.uk
01252 370073



Surrey & Hants Canal Cruises Ltd operate the “John Pinkerton” trip boat.
www.johnpinkerton.co.uk
01962 713564

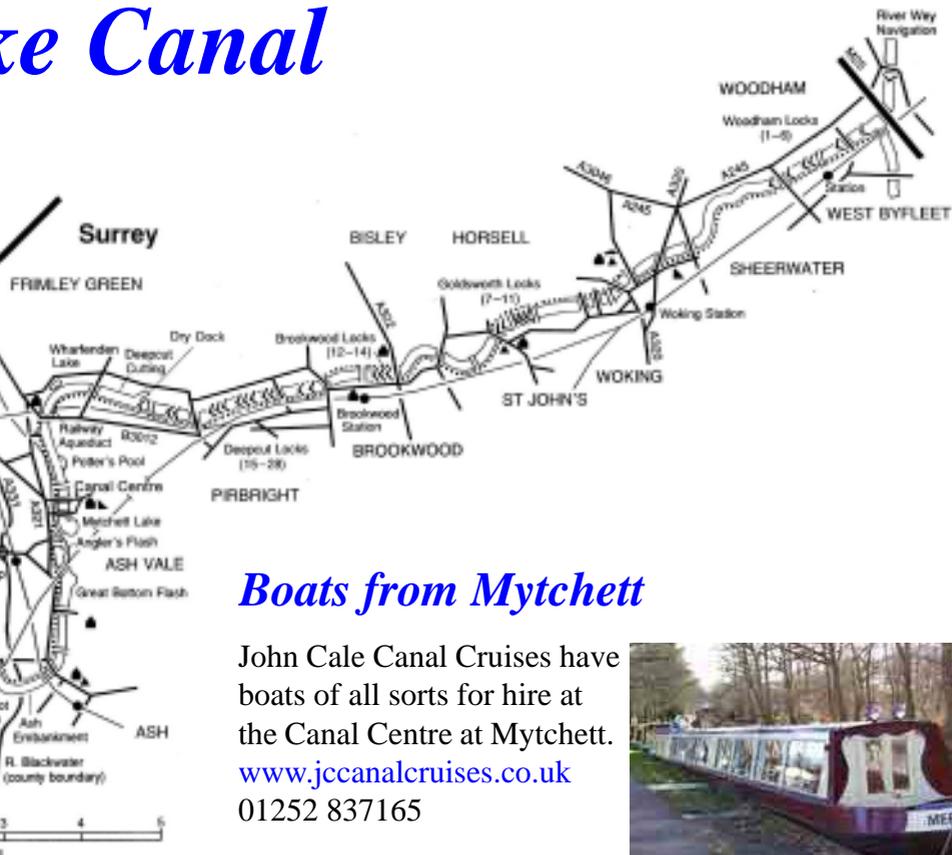
Boats from Colt Hill, Odiham

Accessible Boating operate “Dawn” and “Madam Butterfly”, designed to take wheelchair passengers.
www.accessibleboating.org.uk
01252 622520

Galleon M narrow bo skiffs, can www.galleon 01256 703



Canal



Boats from Mytchett

John Cule Canal Cruises have boats of all sorts for hire at the Canal Centre at Mytchett.
www.jccanalcruises.co.uk
01252 837165



Canal

Marine have holiday boats for hire as well as rowers and punts.
www.basingstokecanoeclub.co.uk
01252 8691

Canoeing at Mytchett

The Basingstoke Canal Canoe Club meets at the Canal Centre. More details at www.b3c.org.uk

Canoeing at Odiham

The Basingstoke & Deane Canoe Club operates from Colt Hill. More details at www.badpaddlers.org.uk



Open Access

The Basingstoke Canal is not managed by British Waterways like the majority of the canals and for many years it has had a reputation for being a bit unwelcoming and difficult to visit. This stems from a Management requirement for visiting boats to be met by a Canal Ranger to check their insurance documents and escort them through the locks.

This practice also had the unwelcome result that the cost of the Ranger's time was more than the Canal Authority received from the boat licence fee - not an encouragement to get more boats on the canal!

This year, however, sees the introduction of a new Open Access policy. Boaters will still have to notify the Canal Authority of their intention to visit, but it is hoped that Basingstoke Canal licences will be available on the River Wey and boats will be able to make their own way onto the canal without escort.

A trial of the new system took place over Easter this year when a small fleet of narrow boats from the Byfleet Boat Club visited

the canal. In all, 8 boats made their way up to the Brookwood Country Park.



Entrance sign at the junction with the Wey Navigation at West Byfleet



A traffic jam at Lock 2. Leo II and Nancy Bell going up meeting White Heather coming down.

After an overnight stay in

Brookwood, the fleet returned to Woking and was back on the River Wey on Easter Monday.

A quiet overnight mooring at the Brookwood Country Park.



The weekend was much enjoyed by all and it was generally agreed that for a first attempt, “Open Access” was an unqualified success. It is to be hoped that the Canal Authority will take the necessary steps to make this the way that all boats visit the Basingstoke Canal in future.

Dredging

The Basingstoke Canal is one of the most tree-lined waterways in the country. This makes it very attractive, but trees shed their leaves and these end up as silt at the bottom of the canal.

Periodic dredging is therefore a necessity, but an expensive one, and disposal of the mud can also pose a problem if there is no convenient nearby dump site. Any significant amount of dredging is a job for a specialist contractor.

During the canal's restoration, most of it was dry dredged using excavators, but from Fleet to the end of the navigation at North Warnborough the job was done by the Canal Society's famous steam powered
d r e d g e r

“Perseverance”.

“Perseverance” at work in Fleet in 1991.



Since the canal re-opened in 1991, several lengths of the canal have been re-dredged by contractors, including Greywell, Broad Oak near Odiham, Barley Mow at Winchfield and Brookwood. In addition, spot dredging in local areas has been done by both the Canal Authority and the Canal Society, both of whom own or have access to dredgers.



Contractor's suction dredger at work at Broad Oak in 1995.

Canal Authority dredger "Unity" at work in Dogmersfield, on this occasion removing a fallen tree.



Spot-dredging by the Canal Society at Hermitage, Woking using "Belfast Girl" in 2008

Volunteers

The restoration of the Basingstoke Canal was achieved as a result of a huge amount of volunteer effort over a period of some 20 years. It was assumed, however, that once the canal re-opened the responsibility for routine maintenance would rest with the owners and the Basingstoke Canal Authority which manages the canal. The Canal Society's volunteers continued to do work to enhance the canal by, for example, installing a back-pumping scheme at St John's.

More recently it has become clear that the Canal Authority does not have the manpower or resources to do all the necessary maintenance. Much of it, such as keeping bankside vegetation under control, is very labour intensive but not particularly skilled. This makes it ideal work for willing volunteers and such work parties



have been run in various places by both the Canal Authority (*Above at Tundry Pond*) and the Canal Society (*Left at North Warnborough*).

The Canal Society's volunteers have taken on many other jobs including, in the last year, installing new landing stages for boats, resurfacing the towpath and repointing a lock chamber walls.



Installing piling for a new landing stage at Runway's End, Rushmoor

A rather extreme example of re-pointing at Lock 17 in Deepcut



Many of the Canal Society volunteers already have skills but training can also be provided for things like dumper or excavator driving, brick laying or chain sawing via the national Waterway Recovery Group. If you would like to get involved, contact the Canal Society via their website at www.basingstoke-canal.org.uk or the Canal Authority at www.basingstoke-canal.co.uk, or phone the Canal Centre on 01252 370073.

Remember!

For those who weren't around 40 years ago and those who have forgotten what the canal was like before it was restored, a few pictures to show what happens to a neglected canal.



Lock 12, next to the traffic lights in Brookwood, in the 1980s; above looking downstream and below upstream.



It could all happen again!



First boat through the restored Lock 12 in May 1987

And finally, as a reminder of how fast nature takes over, the view above Lock 12 only last year after delays in fitting new gates left the pound empty for several months. Happily it is now back in water again!





Published by the
Surrey & Hampshire Canal Society

www.basingstoke-canal.org.uk
