

Wey & Arun Canal News

June 2016

A review of recent events on the Wey & Arun Canal

Surrey canal bridge on schedule for Autumn opening



In May 2016, Canal Trust volunteers demolished the causeway that blocked the canal at Compasses in Alford, revealing the timber parapets of the new bridge that has been built immediately alongside.

To coincide with the bicentenary of the opening of the Wey & Arun Junction Canal – in Alford, Surrey – the Wey & Arun Canal Trust plans to celebrate the opening of the new Compasses Bridge on Sunday 2nd October 2016 at midday.

During Easter 2016, contractors and volunteers achieved a key milestone by successfully switching traffic from the old causeway to the new bridge. The road at the south entrance to Dunsfold Park was closed for just under a week; this was a very tight window that could not be extended and it was a huge relief when the first lorries used the new route. Trust volunteers quickly started to remove the road surface on the old concrete causeway, now thought to have been built during the 1930s, and to demolish the structure. By mid-May, the wall blocking the bridge arch was removed, revealing the future canal route under the bridge. Volunteers carried out the demolition work very carefully because of concerns that remains of the original canal bridge (built around 1815) might be underneath the causeway, but so far nothing has been found.

The Trust's bridge engineer, Tony Ford, has done a fantastic job keeping the project on time and within budget, but there is still a funding gap of £120,000 so the Trust has launched a 'Last Push' appeal to its members and supporters.

Canal celebrates its 200th birthday

The celebrations for the canal's opening in 1816 started at Compasses in Alford. Contemporary accounts tell us that "a plentiful dinner of excellent beef and ale was provided at Alford for the labourers, of which 220 of them partook". Another newspaper story mentions a roasted ox and 200 gallons of ale. After the official party had travelled by barge from Alford to Guildford, 121 people sat down to dinner at the White Hart Inn and "partook of a sumptuous repast provided by the Committee".

The Canal Trust does not guarantee to be quite so lavish with its 2016 festivities, but plans a full weekend of events. As well as the bridge opening on 2nd October, on 1st October a day of family events takes place at Loxwood, West Sussex. The weekend concludes with a celebration tea at the Sea Cadet Hall near Dapdune Wharf on the River Wey in Guildford (the White Hart Inn closed around 1905 and is now the site of Sainsburys in the High Street). All events are open to the public.



Sussex lock and bridge rebuilding

Canal Trust volunteers are making excellent progress with the rebuilding of Gennets Bridge Lock in Sussex. Among other tasks, the volunteers have poured 40 tonnes of concrete to form the top cill (shelf) of the lock and a new brick bridge is beginning to take shape.



An attractive arched bridge will carry the Sussex Border Path across the canal at Gennets Bridge.

Opening up new views in Surrey

Recent clearance work by volunteers has opened up intriguing views of the canal route that once passed underneath Whitley Bridge on the Guildford-Horsham railway line. After the railway closed in 1965 and became a popular footpath and cycle route, an embankment replaced the unusual iron bridge that crossed the canal at an extreme skew angle.

Until recently, passers-by scarcely noticed the old canal. All this is set to change as the Canal Trust aims to raise public awareness and knowledge of the canal. The Trust has applied to Waverley Borough Council for planning permission to install an information board. A grant from the D'Oyly Carte Foundation will fund the new board. During the Winter, volunteers have worked hard to clear overgrown vegetation around the site and open up new views. The Trust is evaluating options for a new bridge across the canal route. Recent excavations have revealed numerous parts of the original iron bridge which provide an interesting jigsaw for the Trust's engineer Richard Smart.

Promoting canoeing on the canal

The Canal Trust is very pleased to announce that, with the increasing use of restored sections of canal, British Canoeing has recognised the major contribution to community benefit and leisure opportunities that a restored canal can bring. British Canoeing has provided a grant of £10,000 to allow the Trust

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to improve facilities for canoeists on the canal. The Trust is committed to enabling everyone to enjoy the canal in their own way. Canoeists are welcome on the restored section at Loxwood, West Sussex, and Small Boat rallies have recently taken place at Pulborough (on the River Arun) and at Alfold and Shalford (leading into the River Wey Navigation).



Canoeists on the River Arun during a rally organised by the Wey & Arun Canal Trust

Marine engineer joins Bramley team

The Canal Trust has recently elected Richard Stephens as a Director. Richard adds his experience to the Bramley Link project which is aiming to re-establish the Wey & Arun Canal's link to the national waterways network in Surrey. Richard graduated with a degree in civil engineering to take up a career in planning, design and construction of port and harbour facilities throughout the UK and abroad. For the 10 years before retiring he was Managing Director of the Maritime Division of the Mott MacDonald Group.



Richard Stephens

Staying up to date

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