

Wey & Arun Canal News

June 2017

A review of recent events on the Wey & Arun Canal

New Surrey bridge is complete



Left: Compasses Bridge viewing platform opened to the public in April.

Right: By mid-May the last of the scaffolding had been dismantled and there was water under the bridge.



Dame Penelope Keith officially opened the new Compasses Bridge at Alfold, Surrey, on 2nd October 2016, but there was still a great deal of work for Canal Trust volunteers to complete. Now the bridge is really finished and by mid-May there was water in the canal underneath it. Some of the major jobs that the team had to complete over the winter were the viewing platform (on the site of the old road and causeway) and the curved canalside walls. The viewing platform opened to the public in late April and the last of the scaffolding used for construction was taken away in early May. Johnson Wax kindly supported the landscaping work with a grant of £5,000.

The Canal Trust has ambitious plans for further work in the Alfold/Dunsfold area. Planning is well advanced for a new bridge allowing the canal to pass under the Alfold-Dunsfold road, which currently blocks the route. Construction of a slipway has started and

is expected to be finished by the end of 2017; this will make it much easier to launch small boats on the canal. In the longer term, the Trust would like to offer public boat trips on this attractive section of canal, but before this can happen large amounts of accumulated silt need to be removed from the canal bed.

The section that the Canal Trust is now bringing back to life had a special significance in the history of the canal. Excavating the 'Dunsfold Cutting' was the largest single task that the original builders had to undertake, starting in 1813. This straight section of canal is over a mile long and the specified water depth was six feet. Many hundreds of workers must have been employed, using only hand tools and horse power. The contractor, Zachariah Keppell, underestimated the difficulty of working in the local soil conditions. As a result, he went bankrupt and had to withdraw from the project.

Good progress on rebuilt Sussex lock

In the years after the Wey & Arun Canal closed in 1871, the brick-built locks in northern Sussex and Surrey became a valuable source of building materials. By the time the Canal Trust came to restore these locks, there were usually few signs of where they had stood, only a slight change in the level of the canal bed. The Trust had to plan complete rebuilding. Currently a large team of volunteers is working, usually twice a week, to complete the rebuilding of Gennets Bridge Lock, just south of the Sussex/Surrey border between Loxwood (Sussex) and Alfold (Surrey). Contractors built the concrete shell of the lock in late 2015; volunteers then undertook all the remaining tasks, including facing the concrete with local bricks to recreate the lock's original appearance. This way of working is saving a huge amount of money, compared to using contractors for the whole project.

As well as the lock itself, the volunteers are constructing a new arched bridge to allow walkers on the Sussex Border Path and farm vehicles to cross the canal. The bridge is now nearing completion and the plan is that all construction on the site will be finished by the end of 2017.



Gennets Bridge Lock Project Manager Eric Walker shows off the new bridge, as lock construction continues in the background.

Canal Trust takes on Surrey park

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust has signed an agreement with Surrey County Council to take ownership of the Hunt Nature Park land in Shalford, Surrey. The Canal Trust is establishing a park here, for the enjoyment of all, using a legacy from Edgar and Doris Hunt, who lived in Ifold, Sussex. The park stretches alongside both banks of the Cranleigh Waters river and with the agreement of the County Council the Canal Trust has already carried out extensive work in the area, including a new riverside path, a viewing platform and tree management.

Immediately after the transfer agreement, Canal Trust volunteers set to work planting a hedge with over 1,500 native trees, forming a natural boundary between the Nature Park and land used by a local school.

The Canal Trust's Bramley Link team is finalising plans for a new canal route in this area, re-establishing the vital link between the Wey & Arun Canal and the national waterway system.



Canal Trust volunteers with the new hedge in the foreground.

Online boat trip booking

Visitors to the Canal Trust's showpiece section at Loxwood, Sussex, can now book boat trips online. Previously bookings were only possible by phoning the Trust's Loxwood office during its opening hours, or by visiting the Canal Centre. Online booking is available for both scheduled trips and the popular special trips, such as Cream Tea Cruises and Pirates & Princesses Adventures. The new system has already contributed to a healthy increase in the number of bookings. Experience seems to show that visitors coming from some distance prefer to make their plans in advance and appreciate being able to book at a time convenient to them. The development of online bookings was undertaken by volunteer Derek Wright.

In 2016 the Trust's Boat Group operated 502 trips and carried 11,700 passengers, thanks to a total of 118 volunteer skippers and crew. Their efforts contributed nearly £60,000 towards the restoration of the canal.

The Wey & Arun Canal Trust Ltd
Bridge End, Somerswey
Shalford, Guildford
GU4 8EQ



Thames Water helps flood relief study

The Canal Trust is determined that the new canal route it is planning for the Shalford and Bramley area in Surrey will provide a number of key community benefits. In recent years, homes in Bramley have suffered serious flooding from the Cranleigh Waters river. The main cause of this flooding is the narrow river channel through Station Road bridge, Bramley. Gosden Aqueduct, which formerly carried the canal across the river, has a much smaller effect. Nevertheless, the Trust's Bramley Link team is proposing a new bypass channel which will reduce local flooding and allow fish to pass upstream by avoiding a weir. The aqueduct is unusual in accommodating a full-width canal channel; there are few other examples in the UK.

The next stage is to carry out a detailed engineering study to optimise the design of the new channel. The Canal Trust is delighted that Thames Water has agreed to fund this work with a grant of £12,000.



The downstream side of Gosden Aqueduct, recently cleared of overgrown vegetation by Canal Trust volunteers.

Paddlers are welcome

Canoeists, kayakers and paddleboarders can now explore the peaceful Loxwood section of canal more easily, thanks to new landing stages installed during the winter season. The Canal Trust has a partnership with British Canoeing, the national governing body for paddlesports in the UK, who kindly provided a grant to fund the landing stages and approved the design. Members of British Canoeing enjoy free access to the Wey & Arun Canal, as well as most of the country's navigable rivers and canals. Other visitors are asked to pay a small licence fee.

The Canal Trust sees the restored canal as a benefit for everyone, whether they take to the water in a boat or simply enjoy the canal from the towpath, as a walker, cyclist or horse rider.

Staying up to date

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Shalford office: 01483 505566
Email: northernoffice@weyandarun.co.uk
Loxwood office: 01403 752403
Email: office@weyandarun.co.uk