



# Basingstoke Canal Bulletin

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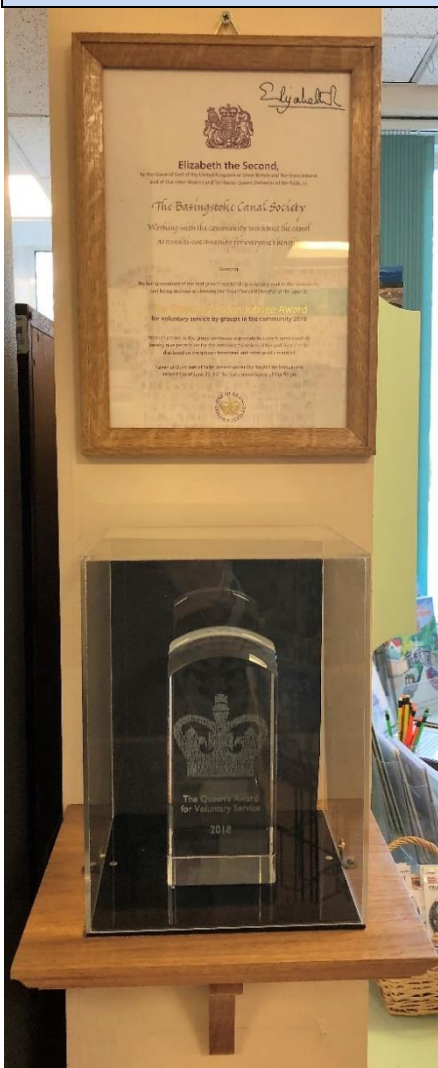


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John Pinkerton  
Canal Cruises

## New Year's Resolutions..?



The Society's Queen's Award for Voluntary Service certificate and trophy mounted and displayed at the Canal Centre (thanks to ranger Andy Loader)

With New Year's resolutions still in our minds we thought that we would offer you a couple of thoughts – book a boat trip for that special occasion, and keep yourself healthy by walking and relaxing along the canal – more on these later.



There are also articles from one of our lengthsmen, birds on the canal, and how the canal restoration started. We also have the first in a series of regular articles talking about the projects that the Canal Society is investing in to help improve the canal. Needless to say, this links into perhaps another New Year's resolution – could you possibly give a bit of time to volunteer and help on the canal? In the [previous Bulletin](#) we explained how our vision for the future needs volunteer support and in particular help with promoting the canal. We are now also looking for someone willing to take on the role of General Secretary - please look at our [website](#), contact us on [volunteer@basingstoke-canal.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@basingstoke-canal.org.uk) or call 07850 652769 to find out more about this and other [vacancies where we need help](#) (all roles can be flexible to suit our volunteers).

Please enjoy our wonderful canal while the weather is reasonable. Just wrap up warm and hit the towpath. In particular, it is worth walking alongside locks 18–24 between Pirbright and Deepcut, which have been drained for repairs (after the fish were rescued and moved). It's a lovely setting and fascinating to see the empty canal and locks.



## Crookham Wharf – An Example Of The Society Investing In The Canal



If you have been to Crookham Wharf recently, you will have noticed that a lot of work has been done there to improve the area for boaters and other users. It has been the main focus of the Society Weekend Working Party since last summer and the work was completed not long before Christmas.

Last year, the Accessible Boating Association (ABA), who run the boats

*Dawn* and *Madam Butterfly* from Odiham, made it known that they were concerned that the wharf at Crookham was too high and access was difficult for disabled boaters. After a discussion with the Canal Authority, it was agreed to remove three courses of brick from the wharf to reduce the height. Lowering the wharf also meant that the area behind it leading to the car park was too high so quite a lot of soil was removed to provide a wide enough landing and towpath, while profiling the bank to avoid awkward drops. Some of this soil was used to build up the bunds (earth banks) around the car park and the entrance gate – this is to stop cars encroaching onto the grassed area.



The wharf was surfaced with a material new to the work party – Coxwell self-binding path gravel, which is named after two villages near Faringdon in Oxfordshire where the quarry producing it is located.

As the name suggests, this product is laid and then rolled to produce a lasting surface that is more harmonious than concrete or paving. It is, however, not cheap and alone cost over £1200. Mooring rings were put in, which are ideal for both boaters and canoeists.





The new wharf created a problem on the towpath away from the bridge in that it was too high as well. So the work party profiled the path to meet the path coming down from the car park and put in the posts and back anchors for the bank protection, using some of the excess spoil to backfill the new bank.

The cost of this project was over £15,000, the bulk of which has come from the Canal Society, along with £1000 from Accessible Boating and £1500 from Crookham Village Parish Council (thanks to these two organisations). We are also grateful to the Exchequer pub (which is very close to the wharf) for providing welfare facilities for those working at the site and who are paying for some advertising on a map board. The project has required about 1500 volunteer hours.

Crookham Wharf (or Chequers Wharf as it is sometimes known) is a great place to start a walk either towards Fleet or upstream into the Hampshire countryside. Already the new wharf is in use and canoeists have said that it is much easier to use, and we hope that it provides better access for ABA and all other canal users. In the meantime the Basingstoke Canal Society Weekend Work Group is moving on to the next project!

*Jeff Hill, Society Workparty Subcommittee*

### **Have You Booked Your Boat Trip Yet?**

#### ***Cruise on the beautiful restored Basingstoke Canal***



A relaxing charter cruise on our trip boat the [\*John Pinkerton II\*](#) (left) is the perfect way to celebrate with family, friends, work or club colleagues. Your party of up to 50 guests will have exclusive use of the boat, leaving from Odiham and winding through the Hampshire countryside. Watch the wildlife and learn about the history of the Canal and the local area. Visit [Odiham Castle](#), from where King John set off for Runnymede to

place his seal on Magna Carta.

The *John Pinkerton II* is also available for public and “theme” trips; the [schedule for 2019](#) has recently been published and includes “Caribbean Night”, “Classic Songs” and “Tapas and Spanish Wine” cruises.

The boat is suitable for all weathers. There is a licensed bar on board and toilet facilities. Light refreshments, tea and coffee are available. You can provide your own catering or we can recommend catering services who will deliver to the boat.

Trips can be tailored to individual requirements but normally last 2½–3 hours and can be combined with other attractions such as [The Watercress Line](#) or the [Basingstoke Milestones Museum](#).

The boat operates from Colt Hill wharf, Odiham, just 7 minutes from the M3 (Junction 5), April through October. Free parking is available, including for coaches. The boat is operated by trained volunteer crews and licensed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Some 5-star [TripAdvisor ratings](#) with great feedback:

*‘Absolutely fabulous, what a lovely way to spend a few hours’*

*‘The staff are volunteers, they were wonderful and are very knowledgeable of the canal’*

If a shorter cruise (75 minutes) fits your plans, then why not join us on the 12-seater, wheelchair-accessible Woking-based trip boat [Kitty](#) (right). She departs from the centre of Woking (adjacent to Brewery Car Park) and heads east towards the Grade II-listed building of the Peace Garden on Horsell Common. The route skirts the edge of Horsell Common, home to kingfishers, herons, red kite, deer, foxes, badgers and many other animals. Indeed, the Common formed the setting for the arrival of the Martians in HG Wells' *War of the Worlds*, so you too may have an 'out of this world' experience!



Why not combine your trip on *Kitty* with a browse in either the award-winning [Lightbox Art Gallery and Museum](#) or WWF's Living World displays?



Boat trips are also run from the [Canal Centre, Mytchett](#) by the Basingstoke Canal Authority. *Rosebud* (left) is a 23ft narrow boat, with seats for up to 12 people. Public trips run every weekend from April - September, and additionally on Mondays and Wednesdays during school holidays. These relaxing trips offer the perfect opportunity to see the wildlife up close and personal as well as explore the canal.

Cream teas cruises run every Tuesday and Thursday from May to September. Enjoy a leisurely cruise down the canal with a traditional cream tea of scones, jam and cream with a pot of fresh coffee. All served at an idyllic setting.

If you would like to book *Kitty* or *John Pinkerton II* for your group or simply join a public trip, go to [johnpinkerton.co.uk/booking](http://johnpinkerton.co.uk/booking), call 01256 765889 or email [jpbbookings@basinstoke-canal.org.uk](mailto:jpbbookings@basinstoke-canal.org.uk) to discuss your trip. You can also buy trip vouchers in advance. For trips aboard *Rosebud*, contact the Canal Centre on 01252-370073.

We look forward to seeing you on board in 2019.

### Feeling Good – Or In Modern Parlance: 'Health & Wellbeing'

There is lots of evidence that suggests that simply being near water makes people more content and relaxed. With no traffic, a fascinating history and an abundance of nature, what better place to unwind than alongside the canal?

Across the country over half the UK population lives within five miles of a canal or river, so it couldn't be easier to take to the towpaths and enjoy the health benefits. We are extra lucky as we have our own Basingstoke Canal.







When you step onto the towpath, you step into a whole new world. It's the ideal place to take a deep breath, shrug off the stresses of the day and enjoy a rejuvenating walk. Moreover, you will also be burning off calories. Experts say just 30 minutes a day is enough to help you feel fitter.

Added to this, volunteering has been adopted as a key part of wider health policy, with the NHS stating that it wants to encourage community volunteering.

Historically, volunteering has sometimes had a bit of an image problem with some groups, particularly younger people. That said, things are changing and a survey by the Guardian interestingly showed that of younger people who volunteered (age 13–24), 95% hoped to develop new skills and gain experience of working as part of teams. Increasingly on the canal we are finding it important to find out exactly what volunteers themselves want, and to then match them up with suitable opportunities. Fortunately, we have so many different roles available on the canal that there is something for everyone.

### **A Day In The Life Of A Lengthsman (An Ode)**

A sunny December day. The bare winter trees are reflected in the calm surface of the canal. The broken bricks at the wharf edge, reported to the rangers, have been repaired. A family of swans glides under Colt Hill Bridge; the cygnets still show grey smudges in their feathers. A check under the bridge for foreign objects in the canal; all clear. Brambles along the towpath still need trimming back (don't they know it's winter). A plastic water bottle thrown in the bushes, a poo bag decorating a branch; both go in the rubbish bag. A runner smiles as she passes and says "Thanks for cleaning up". On the old mud barge by Lodge Copse Bridge, a dozen mallards line up along the edge. A labradoodle bounds happily along the path and stops for a pat. At the sluice to the Whitewater river, the measuring board shows the canal level is -30mm. An elderly man with a cane stops for a natter. By the castle winding hole, the broken branch over the towpath, reported to the rangers last week, has been removed – oh, wait – the whole tree is gone! A ringing bell warns of an approaching cyclist. The tunnel comes into view, end of the length. Nothing major to report today, no fallen trees blocking the canal, no leaks in the embankment; an ordinary day on the canal.



*Cheryl Richards*

*Cheryl is a one of our 60 lengthsman who every few days walk their section ("length") of the canal to check all is ok. Cheryl is also a skipper on the John Pinkerton II and is actively helping to raise the profile of the canal. Lots going on, but very rewarding - Ed.*

### **Water Strategy Team Looking For Help**

The Water Strategy Team would like to ask for your assistance:

- We need a volunteer, qualified to work with 3 phase motor control cubicles, to help during maintenance and future projects relating to the three pumping stations on the canal.

- If anyone has ideas for how large areas of water might be stored near the canal, please share your thoughts
- Would you wish to volunteer to help the Water Strategy Team?

Please give this some thought: [John How](#) or [Martin Leech](#) would like to hear from you.

Our third article dealing with Water Issues on the canal will appear in the next (March) issue.

### **Birds On The Basingstoke**

Imagine you are on the canal or the footpath and a flash of blue catches your eye – it's a kingfisher! Even if you do not have a great interest in birds you can't wait to tell someone.

You have just seen *Alcedo atthis*, the Eurasian Kingfisher. It is 16–17cm long, with a wingspan of 24–26cm and weighing 35–40 grams. You may even hear a sharp, high sound described as 'ch'keee'. Its dagger-shaped bill is black in the male, black and red in the female and its head looks large for its body. Feathers of electric blue with rufous and white patches make it a bird that nearly everyone can identify.



Photo: Hugo Wilson

With so many of us out on the towpath, we think it would be a great idea to put all those eyes and ears to good use, helping to monitor the health of the canal ecosystem. We want your help to record sightings of ANY birds seen on or by the canal so that we can get an indication of the state of the canal throughout the year. It is just as important to know the numbers of the commonly seen birds such as Coots, Mallards, Moorhens, Swans, Canada Geese, as the rarer ones.

So if you spot any birds on or near the canal, please send us the name of the bird(s) with location, date and time. The kilometre posts along the canal can provide a very useful point of reference for location.

Seasonal birds who migrate to the UK for winter that you might see include siskins, about the size of a great tit and will be in flocks high in the Alder trees. Blue tits, great tits, coal tits and long-tailed tits are also worth looking out for. Redwings and fieldfares may be in nearby fields feeding on trees with berries. You might even spot a waxwing.

Please send your sightings to [lengthsman@basingstoke-canal.org.uk](mailto:lengthsman@basingstoke-canal.org.uk) or via Messenger or Facebook to @basingstokecs. We will feed back to you in future Bulletins.

Why not try bird watching? It will increase your enjoyment of our beautiful canal.

*Ken Halls*

### **A Bit Of History – How The Canal Restoration Started**

By 1966, the Basingstoke Canal was derelict. Parts had no water and most of the rest was choked with weeds. All the locks and bridges were in need of repair to some degree and the owner of the canal was drawing up plans to fill in parts and sell the land for redevelopment.

It was at this point that a resident of Brookwood, Jim Woolgar, whose house backed onto the canal, sent the following letter to several local newspapers:

Sir,

*Having spent a few days of my holiday walking the length of the Basingstoke Canal, I am wondering if the local people appreciate what an amenity they have on their doorsteps. It would appear that many are apathetic and treat it as a convenient rubbish dump, however I know that several people are interested in its possible restoration - although at the moment, due to vandalism and the Canal Company's lack of finance, it is still deteriorating.*

*I feel the time is ripe to form a Basingstoke Canal Restoration Society so that a start could be made removing debris and clearing the towpath. Perhaps it might even be possible to re-open it for navigation.*

*If anyone is interested perhaps they would be kind enough to write (enclosing a stamped addressed envelope) and a possible meeting can be arranged if there is sufficient interest.*

*Yours faithfully, EJ Woolgar*



Happily, about a dozen people responded and a meeting was held. The result is that today we can all enjoy the amenity that Jim was wise enough to recognise over 50 years ago. The intervening years saw the formation of the Canal Society, a successful campaign to persuade the County Councils to purchase the canal, and a huge programme of volunteer work to restore it, that led to its official re-opening by the Duke of Kent in May 1991.

### Let Us Have Your Stories And Pictures

As always please let us have your stories and comments. Do you have a story to tell or a club that you would want to mention in the bulletin? Quite simply send an email to [bulletin@basingstoke-canal.org.uk](mailto:bulletin@basingstoke-canal.org.uk).

And don't forget – if you love the canal please spread the word by getting your family and friends to become Friends of the canal and receive this free bimonthly Bulletin (just go to the [Society website](#) and press the red button). In the meantime, write and tell the local councils how important the canal is to you and the community.

Thanks for your help,

*Ken Sankey*

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