

**BASINGSTOKE CANAL JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE****THE SURREY & HAMPSHIRE CANAL SOCIETY REPORT – JANUARY 2012**1. Working Parties

Since our last report in September, the Canal Society has continued to make a major contribution towards the repair and improvement to the canal through the provision of working parties.

**A. The WRG weekend**

A most significant event took place in early October when the Society hosted a visit by the Waterway Recovery Group (WRG) who organised a working weekend on the canal as a tribute to our late Chairman, Peter Redway. The Society's relationship with WRG dates back to the restoration period in the 1970s and 1980s and Peter had worked with WRG over many years including organising very successful work camps in the summer months. The WRG weekend presented an enormous challenge to the Society in terms of organising the work sites, supplying the necessary tools, equipment and materials, liaising with the BCA and providing overnight accommodation. In all, work was undertaken by over 100 volunteers at 8 sites extending from Lock 1 near the R Wey junction in Surrey to Crookham in Hampshire. Work carried out over the weekend included the construction of a boat landing stage below Lock 1, tree clearance and repairs to the canal bank in Sheerwater, the installation of mooring bollards at St Johns, scrub clearing on Ash Embankment, re-surfacing of the towpath in the Norris Bridge area, repairs to brickwork at Crookham Wharf and offside bank clearance on the West Hart Embankment. At the far western end of the canal, some refurbishing work was carried out at a storage building used by the Society in Up Nately on the un-restored section of the canal beyond the tunnel. The WRG working visit represented the largest volunteer effort on the canal since the 'Deepcut Dig' of the late 1970s. It demonstrated what volunteers are capable of doing in terms of the range of skills they can apply and their ability to organise complex tasks. It was also pleasing to note that many of the volunteers were young people who relished the opportunity to escape from the confines of their offices and the tyranny of their computer screens to spend some time in the open air helping to keep the Basingstoke Canal in good repair.

In addition to the immense efforts of the WRG volunteers who came from all over the country to work on the Basingstoke Canal, the success of the work camp was largely due to the commitment and hard work of the Society's members including, in particular, the Vice Chairman, Martin Leech, who organised the work sites, made sure the plant, equipment and materials were in the right place at the right time and coped with all the paperwork and Verna Smith who made all the arrangements for accommodating the

visitors at the St John Ambulance Centre in Farnborough. Kevin Redway also made a tremendous contribution particularly with the transport arrangements which were vitally important in ensuring that the WRG teams had everything they needed to carry out the work. Finally, the Canal Society's thanks must also be conveyed to Jon Green, the Head Ranger and the BCA ranger team who all 'went the extra mile' in order to make sure that we used the services of the volunteers as effectively as possible. The local newspaper summed up the weekend with the very apt headline 'Peter would have been proud'

### B. Canal Society work parties

The Canal Society's work parties have continued to concentrate on several jobs including the finishing of the brickwork at Lock 17 and the completion of the towpath re-surfacing in the Norris Bridge area which had been started by WRG. Another work party assisted the BCA in re-commissioning its dredger/work boat and the same group is currently engaged in repairing the weed-cutter for future service, mainly on the section east of Woking where weed growth is a significant impediment to navigation.

### C. The numbers

Over the period September to December the volunteers contributed 350 man-days (and many of the volunteers are ladies!) which, using a very modest figure for 'value in kind', is equivalent to £25,700. For 2011 the total number of man-days was 834 m/d giving a value in kind figure for the year of £59,000.

## 2. The Navigation

We are heartened to see that work is progressing on Locks 19 and 20 at Deepcut. The work already undertaken at Brookwood, including the replacement of some lock gates and the re-watering of the lock pounds has already generated favourable comment and underlines the importance of convincing the public that the canal is 'open for business'. We strongly urge the BCA and Surrey CC to continue to press the contractors to keep up the momentum to ensure that the essential work at Deepcut is completed in the spring so that through navigation can be restored.

The Canal Society has been disappointed at the slow rate of progress on the 'Open Access' policy. We have stressed the importance of changing the deep seated perception of the boat owning community elsewhere on the canal system that the Basingstoke Canal is closed and un-navigable. Whilst it is true that through navigation has been impossible for the last 3 years, the pounds up to Brookwood can be accessed from the R Wey and the isolated Hampshire pound has rarely been subject to any closures. In order to make the canal attractive to visiting boats, there is now broad acceptance by the BCA that access to the canal from the R Wey should be available at all reasonable times and that a way must be found to remove the necessity for boats to be supervised through the locks by the rangers. We are now planning for a boat rally at Frimley Lodge Park in June and the

success of the rally is crucially dependent on both the completion of the work at Deepcut and the finalisation of a new policy to make open access available from the spring onwards. We alluded to this issue in our report to the JMC in September 2011 (having previously raised the issue over a year ago) but the final form of the policy has yet to be agreed. We strongly urge that this issue is addressed without further delay.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION:** The BCA is tasked with agreeing an Open Access Policy with the User Groups by the end of March.

### 3. Canal-side Developments

In previous reports we have alluded to the importance of ensuring that the canal benefits from developments on land adjacent to the canal. This has become a more significant issue in recent years because several new developments, long mooted, are now becoming closer to fruition. These developments include housing schemes at Brookwood Farm, Deepcut and Aldershot. There is also a likelihood that another development will shortly become the subject of a planning application at Colt Hill, Odiham. All these developments offer opportunities to capitalise on the proximity of the housing to the canal. Facilities which the developments could offer include:

- Boat moorings either in boat basins, off-line berths or new mooring points alongside properties
- Provision for visiting boats – landing stages, water points and facilities for the disposal of waste
- Additional water supplies – these could include storage reservoirs, back-pumping schemes, bore holes etc.

In our experience developers are very keen to work on these ideas but, in order to make the necessary impact, it is important, in our view, that the whole Canal Partnership (including the Districts, the BCA and the County Councils) use their collective strength to make sure that the canal receives a benefit through the Community Infrastructure Levy, through contractor/developer support and through imaginative planning.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION:** Repeating the plea we made in our September report, can we have an acceptance by the JMC of our suggestion that the Canal Partnership uses its combined resources to derive the maximum benefits from canal-related developments and to adopt practical measures to achieve that objective.

### 4. Income Generation

The Canal Society is working with the County Councils and the IWA on a proposed application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant towards the preservation and protection of the canal as an important heritage asset and as an educational resource. We are also very willing to work with the BCA, the Canoe Club and the County Councils on

the project to provide an enhanced camping facility, amenity building and canoe centre at Mytchett. Now that planning permission has been granted for this scheme we urge the JMC to ensure that a team is being established to determine how this project will be delivered and financed.

## 5. Water

Recognising the vital importance of enhancing the water supply to the canal, given its history of water shortages and the fact that drier conditions appear to be becoming more prevalent, a Water Resources Group has been formed and comprises representatives of the Canal Society, the Inland Waterways Association and the Basingstoke Canal Boat Club. The Resources Group is examining a number of options for increasing the water supply and improving the management of the water body. These include better management of the water pumping facilities, the provision of new bore holes, accessing supplies from disused reservoirs at Bourley near Aldershot and pressing for reduced abstraction at Greywell. It is recognised that most of these options will involve significant investment and will take time to reach fruition. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that the long term sustainability of the canal is dependent on securing additional supplies of water. The first report of the WRG is attached to this report.

## 6. Frimley Boat Rally

This year the canal will celebrate the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of its re-opening. To mark this important milestone and to celebrate the re-opening of the navigation, following completion of the essential repairs at Deepcut and Brookwood, the Canal Society is holding a boat rally at Frimley Lodge Park on 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> June. It is hoped that the rally, which is being held over the Jubilee weekend, will attract visiting boats from other parts of the inland waterways network. We are also planning a programme of events and visiting attractions which will provide both the boating enthusiasts and the general public with an enjoyable day in the attractive surroundings of the canal. The rally will also provide a focus for Jubilee events being organised by the local community. The rally is strongly supported by Surrey Heath Borough Council who are providing us with the use of the park and its facilities. As the next meeting of the JMC will be close to the date of the rally, this is our last opportunity to enlist the support of the Canal Partnership in helping us to make a success of the event. Members can provide support in a number of ways including:

- Helping us with publicity – for example including the event in local authority events leaflets, websites etc
- Nominating a point of contact so our organisers can liaise on the arrangements for the event.
- Ensuring that they are represented e.g. with a stand or tent
- Attending and joining us in our celebrations
- Providing financial support and sponsorship

We believe that the rally will provide an excellent opportunity to re-launch the canal and promote it as an attractive place for the range of recreational activities that it offers – in addition to boating these include canoeing, walking, cycling, fishing, studying the natural world etc.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The JMC confirms its full support for the rally to be held in Frimley Park on 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> June.

#### 7. Other Matters

(a) The Canal Society has previously suggested that the governance structure for the canal should be reviewed in order to identify ways in which the management can be streamlined and better use made of the limited resources available to the BCA. We would ask that this important matter is referred to a working group which should be tasked with bringing forward recommendations to the next meeting of the Committee.

(b) Ash Lock Depot has been identified as a suitable site for a new operations base for the canal. Facilities could include wet and dry docks, workshops, offices and storage facilities. This is an important project for the canal and needs to be given a high priority. We recommend that officers are tasked with making a presentation to the next meeting of the Committee at which the proposals can be outlined and discussed.

Philip Riley  
Chairman  
The Surrey & Hampshire Canal Society

14<sup>th</sup> January 2012