

March Meeting

Peter Payne – “The Life and Times of a Thames Lock-keeper Today”

We were blessed with two waterways personalities at our March meeting. We were obviously expecting our speaker, Peter Payne, who is the lock-keeper at St John’s Lock on the River Thames at Lechlade. We were surprised and delighted to discover that Peter’s wife, who accompanied him, was no other than Liz Payne, former IWA Deputy National Chairman and now Chairman of the Cotswold Canals Trust.

Peter started his talk to a large audience in the usual fashion describing his background and his current job. He is a waterways and gardening enthusiast who came to lock keeping after many years as a bank manager in Northampton. He became keeper at St John’s Lock following the death of the former incumbent for 18 years, Bob Williams, a popular character in the local community.

St John’s is the first lock of the 45 on the non-tidal River Thames, 198.67kms (just over 123 miles) from Teddington Lock, the lowest lock, beyond which are tidal waters. Above St John’s the Thames flows for 23 miles through the Cotswolds, via Lechlade and Cricklade, to its source in Gloucestershire. The actual head of navigation is Tower Bridge at Cricklade, but it is only possible to reach there in very small, shallow drafted craft. The lock is the smallest (in capacity) on the Thames, containing 330,000 litres of water, and is 71.10 metres above sea level (compared with the final lock downstream, that at Teddington, which is only 4.30m above sea level).

About half a mile above Lechlade we find a three way water junction at Inglesham. To the right the River Colne enters the Thames. On the left the Thames continues its route to Cricklade. Immediately ahead is Inglesham Lock at the entrance to the Thames and Severn Canal which opened in 1789 and via the Stroudwater Navigation made its way to the River Severn. As we all know, those canals are now the most major restoration project in the country, under the Cotswold Canals banner. It is possible to wind a full length narrow boat at the Inglesham junction.

Peter explained the history of the St John’s site. The first lock on this site was built in 1790. The lock and its adjoining bridge were named after an Augustinian priory, dedicated to St John the Baptist, that was established nearby in 1250, but which has long since disappeared. With a fall of less than a metre (2 foot 10 inches) this is one of the shallowest locks on the river. We heard the history of various lock houses on site, with the current building, where Peter and Liz live, being built in 1974. At the same time the paddle and rhymer weir was replaced with a modern radial structure. An interesting fact is that the current Oxfordshire/Gloucestershire boundary goes down the centre of the lock.

The most famous permanent resident at St John’s Lock is ‘Old Father Thames’ – the famous concrete statue created by Raffaello Monti for the 1851 Great Exhibition at London’s Crystal Palace. When the latter burnt down in 1936 the statue was moved to near the river’s source at Trewsbury Meads in Gloucestershire.

Memories of Alan Moorse

For a while Alan and Sonja Moorse were very active Canal Society committee members. It was at a time when committee members were sometimes thin on the ground and a number of committee meetings were held at their home in Stockbridge.

For a period they ran the sales stand and waterway causes often benefited from funds raised by the sale of produce from their large garden.

The last time that most SCS members will have met Alan and Sonja was on the occasion of a Society coach trip to the Black Country Museum. They had travelled with their narrow boat

However, following incidents of vandalism it was relocated to its last resting place at St John’s in 1974.

Peter advised us that the Right of Navigation on the River Thames stems from Magna Carta. For many years the river was sadly neglected and actual navigation was virtually impossible in parts. However, with the opening of connecting canals in 1789 and 1792 there was a massive improvement programme involving locks and bridges etc.

We were reminded that navigation is only a small part of the Environment Agency’s (EA) responsibilities. As far as the Thames is concerned their main responsibility is water management and flood control. As Peter explained, the main duties of a lock-keeper include the operation and management of water levels through the control of weirs (originally constructed to maintain water levels for the many mills on the river). He went on to describe the different types of locks and weirs that had been in use on the river over the years. The first pound lock had been built on the river in 1898. Until then navigation had only been possible with the use of ‘Flash Locks’ which were dangerous structures to use. In fact, the last flash lock (at Eaton Hastings) was not finally removed until 1938! Referring to water management he provided us with the salient fact that one third of all water into the Thames comes from Swindon Sewerage Works!

Peter referred to the high level of boaters’ criticism of the EA during the 2007 floods. He explained that that criticism was unjust, reminding us that the EA’s prime responsibility in such circumstances is flood control. Whilst much assistance was provided to stranded boats by EA staff, including lock-keepers, it was stressed that EA is not a rescue service!

He went on to show us photographs of the St John’s area during the major floods of 2007, particularly of the lock area and of adjacent flooded meadows, taken from the 1st floor bedroom of the lock house. Amongst the many other photographs shown to us, during better conditions, was a superb aerial view of the lock site showing the lock, lock house, side weir, main weir and the famous ‘Trout Inn’.

Fascinating wildlife abounds in and around the lock area. There is a large otter population and there are red kites, roe deer, owls and buzzards together with the many other species of birds usually seen on the waterways, particularly kingfishers.

During his talk Peter gave us many examples of the day to day experiences of a lock-keeper, including the humorous incidents and strange sights to be seen sometimes.

A fascinating and interesting talk Peter for which we owe you many thanks. A donation was made to the Cotswold Canals Trust in recognition of a very pleasurable evening.

Paul Herbert

‘Guelrose’ from Hopwas and moored just along the canal from Dudley Tunnel.

In the afternoon all members of our coach party were invited to visit their boat. The endless stream of people came through from bow to stern. A number of people emerged who we had never seen before. They had presumed that ‘Guelrose’ was part of the museum exhibition.

Alan just laughed. “Oh well,” he said. “The more the merrier.”

Brian Evans

Waterways Diary

The following is a list of waterway events taking place within approximately 50 miles of Southampton. Whilst every effort is made to ensure the correctness of this information, please check with the listed contact who will be glad to confirm and supply further details.

Recently, OS grid references and/or postcodes have been added (where known but not guaranteed) to aid location of the event. If YOU know of an event taking place that should be in this list then please contact the editor.

Time	Organiser	Details	Contact
Thu 2 Apr 2009 7.45pm	Southampton CS	Alan J Smith will talk about "Alaska and the Yukon". Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton, SO16 7JZ. (SU410184)	Angela Rose: 02380 403982 Email: info@apas-engineering.com
Wed 15 Apr 2009	Surrey & Hampshire CS	'One Man and a Narrowboat' - The changing face of England's Waterways by Steve Haywood. Parish Pavilion, Recreation Ground, Station Road, Chobham, Surrey GU24 8AZ. (SU974615)	David Millett: 01252 617364 Email: d.millett7@ntlworld.com Web: www.basingstoke-canal.org.uk
Sat 18 Apr 2009	Basingstoke Canal Authority	Join Canal Ranger Peter Bickford for an early morning stroll down the Canal at Brookwood, listen and learn about birdsongs. Peter will be focusing on resident birds for this walk. Booking essential, £3 per person	Canal Centre: 01252 370073
Sun 19 Apr 2009	Arundel Boat Club	Arundel Boat Club river trip to Black Rabbit PH. Start from Pulborough. (TQ046184)	Colin Huggins: 02392 467828 Email: tideeach@tiscali.co.uk
Sun 19 Apr 2009 10.00am	Somersetshire Coal CS	WALK - Wellsway Pit. Meet: Radstock Public Car Park, Waterloo Road, Radstock. (ST690549) (3 miles walk)	Mike Chapman: 01225 426948
Fri 24 Apr 2009 8.00pm	Kennet & Avon CT	"Energy efficient Narrowboats" with Dr. Hugh Swann. All Saints Church Hall, Downshire Square, Reading, RG1 6NH (SU704729).	John or Pam Swift: 01189 415540 Email: johns@360swift.com
Fri 24 Apr 2009 8.00pm	Chichester District Museum	Talk by Alan Green: "How Chichester Got It's Canal." Places are limited and must be booked in advance. Tickets: £4 or £3 concession	District Museum: 01243 784683 Email: districtmuseum@chichester.gov.uk
Sun 26 Apr 2009 10.30am	Sussex Industrial Archaeology Society	History & nature guided walk (Free). Meet at the canal basin, Chichester (SU858041). Walk 4 miles to the sea lock, Birdham.	Walk details: 01243 576701
Wed 29 Apr 2009 7.45pm	Kennet & Avon CT	K&ACT Newbury Branch AGM. Followed by "Crofton Pumping Station" by Ray Knowles. The Stone Building, The Wharf, Newbury RG14 5AS.	Graham Smith: 01635 580356 Email: GrahamV.Smith@virgin.net
Thu 30 Apr 2009 7.45pm	Southampton CS	"Panama Canal" with Roger Squires. Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton, SO16 7JZ. (SU410184) NB This is the "MAY" meeting!	Angela Rose: 02380 403982 Email: info@apas-engineering.com
Sat 2 May 2009	Basingstoke Canal Authority	Join Canal Ranger Peter Bickford for an early morning stroll down the Canal at Brookwood, listen and learn about birdsongs. Peter will be focusing on migrant birds for this walk. Booking essential, £3 per person	Canal Centre: 01252 370073
Sun 10 May 2009	IWA Solent & Arun Branch	IWA Solent & Arun Branch river trip on River Arun to Pallingham. Start from Pulborough. (TQ046184)	Brendan Whelan: 01903 816012 Email: solentandarun@waterways.org.uk
Sun 10 May 2009 12.00 noon - 4.00pm	Sussex Industrial Archaeology Society	Poyntz Bridge (SU859039) open. A chance to cross the canal on the unique 1820 cast iron bridge.	Linda Wilkinson: 01243 576701
Sun 10 May 2009 2.30pm	Chichester District Museum	"A basin full of history" A tour with local historian Alan Green exploring the rich history of Chichester's canal basin. Tickets from Chichester District Museum (£4 or £3 concessions). Places are limited and must be booked in advance.	District Museum: 01243 784683 Email: districtmuseum@chichester.gov.uk
Sat 16 May 2009 11.00am	Southampton CS	Special guided tour of the Purton Hulks led by Paul Barnett. Approx 2+ hours weather permitting. Cost £3.50. Meet Purton Lower Bridge, Gloucester & Sharpness Canal (S0692044). See front page.	Maureen Greenham: 023 8040.6951 Email: maureen.greenham@dsl.pipex.com
Sun 17 May 2009 10.00am	Somersetshire Coal CS	WALK - Kilmersdon Pit & Inclined Plane. Meet: Radstock Public Car Park, Waterloo Road, Radstock. (ST690549) (3 miles walk).	Mike Chapman: 01225 426948
Thu 21 May 2009 7.30pm	IWA Salisbury Group	Peter Dunn & George Eycott will be talking about "The Claverton pump & Burbage crane." Green Dragon, Alderbury, Wilts, SP5 3AR. (SU183274)	Jon Van de Geer: 01722 412841 Ron & Myra Glover: 01722 710322 Email: glover3@gotadsl.co.uk
23-24 May 2009	Surrey & Hampshire CS	Brookwood Boat Rally. (SU964576).	David Millett: 01252 617364 Email: d.millett7@ntlworld.com Web: www.basingstoke-canal.org.uk
Thu 11 Jun 2009 7.45pm	Southampton CS	Society 'social' evening comprising a Silent Auction and a General Knowledge Quiz. Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton, SO16 7JZ. (SU410184)	Angela Rose: 02380 403982 Email: info@apas-engineering.com
Sat 20 Jun 2009	Kennet & Avon CT	Reading Water Fest	John or Pam Swift: 01189 415540 Email: johns@360swift.com
Sat 27 Jun 2009 10.30am	Sussex Industrial Archaeology Society	Guided walk along the site of part of the Portsmouth and Arundel Canal (Free). Meet at Barnham Court Farm, Barnham (SU956035) for a 4 mile walk to Ford. Allow 4 hours.	Walk details: 01243 576701
Sun 28 Jun 2009	IWA Salisbury Group	Having heard the talk in May, now a visit to Claverton to see the Claverton pumping station and inspect the restoration work on the Burbage crane. For further details see Contact column.	Jon Van de Geer: 01722 412841 Ron & Myra Glover: 01722 710322 Email: glover3@gotadsl.co.uk
Thu 2 Jul 2009 7.45pm	Southampton CS	To be announced.	Angela Rose: 02380 403982 Email: info@apas-engineering.com
Thu 2 Jul 2009 7.30pm	Chichester Ship Canal Trust	Talk: "Past, Present & Future of the Chichester Canal." At Christ Church, South Street, Chichester. Tickets £3.00 from Linda Wilkinson.	Linda Wilkinson, 1 Chidham Lane, Chidham, Chichester, PO18 8TL Tel: 01243 576701
Sun 19 Apr, 17 May, 21 Jun, 19 Jul, 16 Aug 2009 2.00pm	Paul Barnett	Guided tours through the remains of the Purton Hulks led by Paul Barnett, Marine Historian. Donations in aid of Severn Area Rescue Association. or £3.00 per person. Approx 2 hours weather permitting. Meet Purton Lower Bridge, Gloucester & Sharpness Canal (S0692044).	Paul Barnett: 07833 143231 Email: barnadillo@aol.com

SOUTHAMPTON CANAL SOCIETY

Established 1967

The objectives of the Society are to foster interest in canals and inland waterways, to assist in their preservation, restoration and development, and to give practical help on waterway projects.

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Meetings:

Normally 1st Thursday each month at 7.45pm. (See Waterways Diary.) Chilworth Parish Hall, Chilworth, Southampton, SO16 7JZ. OS Grid Ref: SU410184.

New canal opens

In what was intended to be a low-key ceremony, the Liverpool Canal Link was officially opened on 25th March 2009 in front of huge crowds at the Pier Head.

Mayor of Liverpool Steve Rotheram, with other invited guests, travelled along the Link from Princes Dock aboard the *Pride of Sefton*. The boat emerged from the tunnel at the Pier Head to loud cheers.

British Waterways Chairman Tony Hales thanks the crowd for coming and praises the successful efforts of the various parties that have worked together to ensure the creation of the link. The Mayor of Liverpool, Steve Rotheram, then said that the Pier Head was now a must-see destination.

The actual opening was carried out by a group of children from New Park Primary School, who unveiled a plaque.

The *Pride of Sefton* then continued into the final tunnel towards Mann Island Lock and Canning Dock.

It passed through the new lock at Mann Island and entered Canning Dock. After travelling through the famous Albert Dock, it moored up in Salthouse Dock for the guests to disembark. It was joined by the flotilla of boats that had travelled down into Liverpool for the opening.

The Link will not open for boaters properly until April 20th. More information for boaters considering coming to Liverpool can be found on the internet at www.penninewaterways.co.uk/news/news2009a.htm#liverpoolink3.

www.penninewaterways.co.uk



Huge crowds at the Pier Head

Call to save water at Kennet & Avon Canal hot spots

British Waterways is calling on its boating customers to help conserve water on the Kennet & Avon Canal as concerns grow over low water levels.

The main water source for the canal is from an abstraction on the River Avon near Claverton. This water is supplemented by a number of other smaller feeders along the 87 miles of the canal, and is then recycled and transferred using a back pumping scheme.

A pump failure at Bradford on Avon, next to the most heavily used lock on the whole canal, and the largest pump in the chain, has led staff to ask boaters to help conserve water until the repairs can be carried out.

Will Burnish, asset manager for British Waterways said: "Bradford on Avon is a critical point on the canal for us. We have two pumps here and with one of them down, we just cannot get the water from below the lock pumped back up to the upper wharf as quickly as

we'd like to. We're doing everything we can to get the pump mended as soon as possible, but in the meantime if boaters can help us by sharing locks it will really help".

As well as sharing locks, boaters are asked to make sure that the lock paddles are fully lowered to prevent unnecessary leakage and that local signs and advice are followed.

Cathleen Ryan, water engineer added: "The Kennet & Avon Canal does suffer from low water levels at places of high demand like Bradford on Avon and the Caen Hill Flight. If we can get boaters to help us out by waiting a few moments so that they share the lock with another boat, we can cut our water consumption drastically.

Water is just about the most precious resource we have on the canal and if we all work together we can make it go further and last longer. It looks like being a great weekend for boating so we'll be doing all we can to keep the boats afloat"

www.waterscape.com