

## Melksham Wharf to Gallows Bridge

Almost opposite the entrance to Wharf Court is Hardie Walk – take this path to Milton Avenue. Turn right here and then left into Sangster Avenue – the canal is now on your left in the back gardens of the houses along this road.

At Pembroke Road turn left and just past the small electric substation building look back into the gardens on the left – you will be able to see the tree/hedgerow which was the towpath hedge. It was roughly around this spot that Gallows Bridge footbridge stood (5).

## Gallows Bridge to Lowbourne Bridge

Turn right into Ruskin Avenue and walk northwards past the residential home Brookside on your right – built directly on the line of the canal (6). Just before you reach the army cadet centre take the footpath to your right but stop before you come to the end of the tall wire fence on your left – here a few trees mark the old line. The land enclosed within the fence is the part of the embankment that took the canal high above Clackers Brook (7). With a little imagination you can see the towpath and canal bed through the fence. As you follow the path around to the left you will cross the brook below at the base of the embankment. The face of its box ashlar culvert has survived well.

The canal continues northwards in the form of gardens, however you must detour to the right following the concrete path between the flats in Hampshire Place and take the narrow path leading to Sandridge Road (8). Turn left here and at the junction with Forest Road you will see the bridge parapet ahead of you. This parapet formed the north wall of Lowbourne Road bridge (9).

## Lowbourne Bridge to Forest Lock

Again the canal along here has been lost to gardens – however, the towpath hedge remains. To retrace the line walk along Forest Road and left into Murray Walk – the canal is straight ahead of you where the road meets the field. It was at this point that the canal was spanned by a lift bridge (10), operated in a drawbridge fashion. Recent investigations have revealed that a high level tramway was built from the canal at this point to the former Spencers works at Beanacre Road which supplied iron ore to be smelted at the foundry there. Evidence of the tramway can be found along Murray Walk in the undergrowth to

the right of the path just before the river (halfpenny) bridge where the original foundations are still in situ. The tramway itself ran high above the flood plain on iron supports and the earth embankments which still stand today. Back at Murray Walk road rejoin the narrow towpath which runs high on an embankment from the fields on your left. This short stretch takes you to Awdry Avenue where the entire embankment has been filled in and grassed over.

Follow the line past the allotments and straight on over the minor road leading to Methuen Avenue and along the path through the houses. Cross another minor road and follow the hedge on your left behind the garages to the end of this trail where you reach the fields. You are now standing on the site of Melksham Forest Lock (11) which raised the canal nine feet from the three mile flat pound through Melksham. The lock cottage (12) which stood to your left in the field was demolished in 1956. Access to the cottage was only via the towing path.



The Wilts and Berks Canal Trust promotes the preservation and improvement of the canal and its branches. The Trust's ultimate goal is to restore a continuous navigable waterway linking the Kennet and Avon

Canal, the Thames and Severn Canal and the River Thames. The Melksham Branch of the Trust, which produced this leaflet in conjunction with Superior Creative, meets every second Tuesday of the month at the King's Arms, Melksham at 8.00pm.

Local branch contact: 01380 828254.

The Trust is planning fact sheets giving more detailed information on points of interest associated with the canal and these will be made available through the Melksham tourist office as they are produced.

The Wilts and Berks Canal Trust is a non-profit distributing company limited by guarantee.

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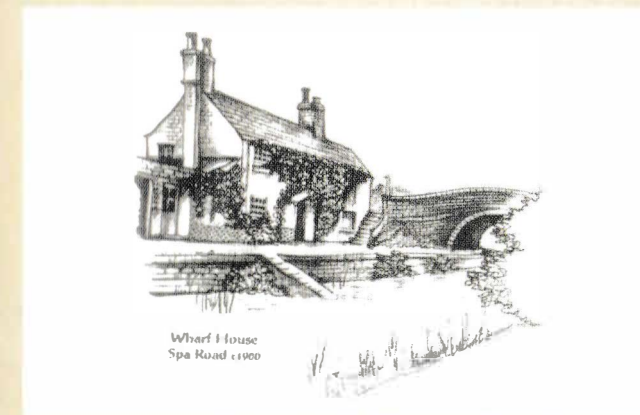
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## A walk along *The Lost Waterway of Melksham*



The Wilts & Berks Canal was built between 1795 and 1810 linking the Kennet & Avon Canal (originally the Western Canal) at Semington near Melksham and Abingdon on the Thames in Berkshire. Branches connected Chippenham, Calne, Longcot and Wantage to the main line and freight included coal, corn, stone, iron, timber, lime and chalk. The North Wilts branch from Swindon to the Thames & Severn Canal at Latton (near Cricklade) was completed in 1819. When the Wilts & Berks was built Melksham had a population of just over 5,000 and the village of Swindon a mere 1,000. The canal was finally abandoned by Act of Parliament in 1914.

Some building has taken place on the line of the canal but much of it still exists in the form of lock and bridge remains, embankments, towpaths, hedgerows and ditches. In canalside towns and villages many roads and building names mark this era and there is considerable interest in restoring this significant piece of our transport heritage.



# The Guided Walk

## Towpath to Melksham Wharf

Begin your walk at the Southern end of Melksham at the West End Inn, Semington Road. Opposite the West End Inn is Waverley Gardens and you will find a footpath halfway along the north side of the road (1) – this was the canal towing path.

The canal itself was on the right-hand side of the path and is now incorporated into gardens. The red brick wall on your left hand side is built from the same type of clay bricks (perhaps not during the life of the canal) used on the canal. Bricks were baked in purpose-built kilns which, for convenience, were built alongside the canal wherever construction work took place.

Follow the path until you reach the electricity substation on your left (2). The houses on this side were built during the canal's lifetime and can be seen in old photographs of Melksham wharf. The path ahead comes to a dead end at the site of the wharf – so take the path to the right and turn left into Kenilworth Gardens. Follow the road around Warwick Crescent and turn left at the junction with the busy Spa Road (3).

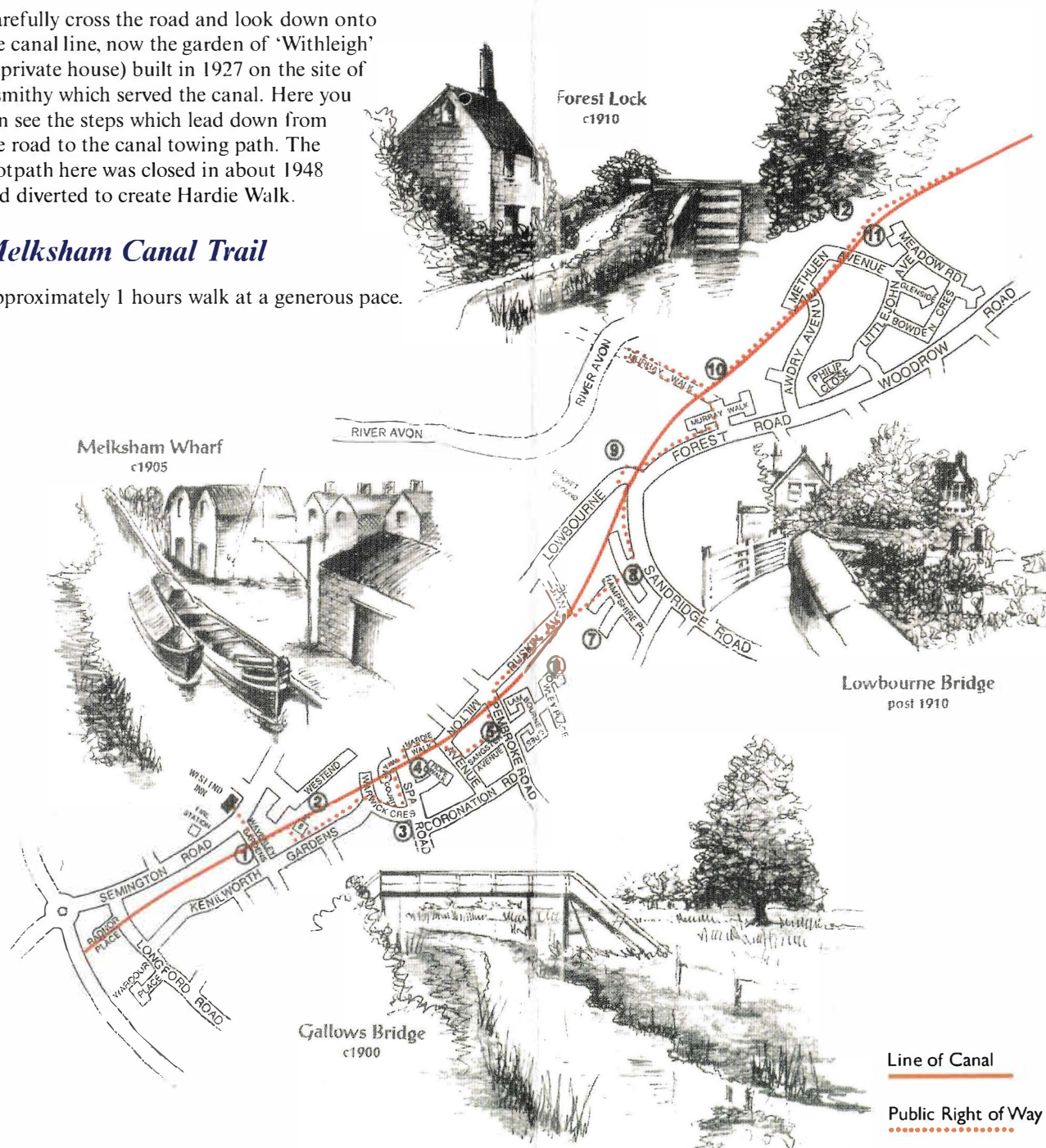
Looking ahead you will see a hump in the road – this is the site of Spa Road bridge (lowered in 1924) which carried the main Devizes to Melksham road over the canal. As you approach the 'bridge' you will see a housing development to your right on the site of the rope factory owned by Charles Maggs; the road is aptly named Rope Walk. Ropes up to a quarter of a mile long were produced at this canal side factory and transported on the canal to Abingdon on the Thames and beyond. Charles Maggs also founded the Wiltshire United Dairies, the first to develop condensed milk.

As you reach the brow of the 'bridge' you will see on your left Wharf Court, a large complex of flats, standing on the site of Melksham wharf. This wharf was once a busy canalside settlement where grain was brought in for the Melksham mills along with coal from the Somerset coalfields for the town before the railway and a decent road system had emerged. Unfortunately all signs of the canal have been destroyed, including the wharf house which stood next to the bridge.

Carefully cross the road and look down onto the canal line, now the garden of 'Witleigh' (a private house) built in 1927 on the site of a smithy which served the canal. Here you can see the steps which lead down from the road to the canal towing path. The footpath here was closed in about 1948 and diverted to create Hardie Walk.

## Melksham Canal Trail

Approximately 1 hours walk at a generous pace.



Illustrations by Gill Goodhind