

A Brief History

The Wilts & Berks Canal was promoted from 1793 as a means of providing cheap transport. The Bill empowering construction of the canal received Royal Assent in 1795. The canal was cut from the Kennet & Avon Canal at Semington, near Melksham, to the River Thames at Abingdon during the years 1796 to 1810. A link from Swindon to the Thames & Severn Canal at Latton (near Cricklade) was completed in 1819.

This link, known as the North Wilts Canal, allowed traffic to bypass the difficult River Thames navigation between Lechlade and Abingdon. The main line of the canal was 52 miles long, with six miles of branches and nine miles of the North Wilts Canal. It was cut to take narrow boats 72 feet long and 7 foot wide, carrying 35 tons.

There were 42 locks on the main line, 11 on the North Wilts Canal and three on the Calne branch. There were three short tunnels. The canal enjoyed a period of prosperity between 1817 and 1841.

However, with the coming of the Great Western Railway in 1841 decline set in. Stanley Aqueduct collapsed in 1901, stopping through traffic, and the canal was abandoned by Act of Parliament in 1914.



The last lock before the river

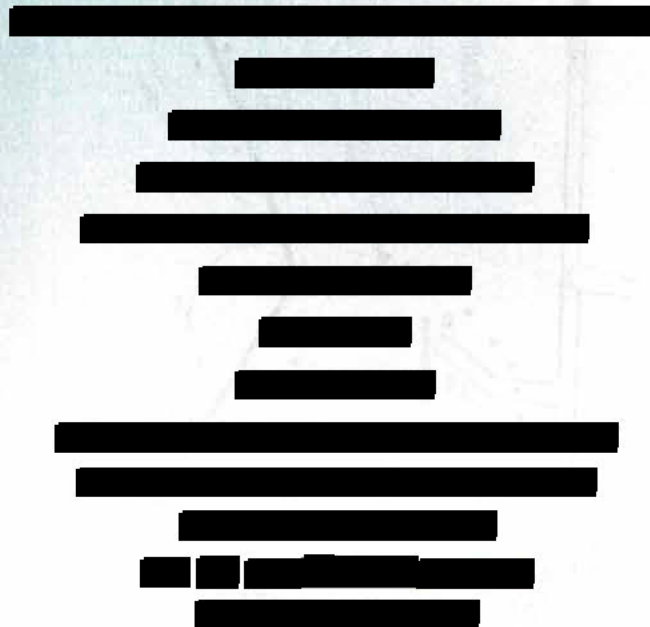
The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust

The aim of the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust is to protect, conserve and improve the route of the Wilts & Berks and North Wilts canals, and branches, for the benefit of the community and environment. Its ultimate goal is to restore a continuous navigable waterway linking the Kennet & Avon Canal at or near Melksham, the River Thames at or near Abingdon, and the Thames & Severn Canal at or near Cricklade.

The Trust was originally called the Wilts & Berks Canal Amenity Group and was formed in 1977. The Trust's current membership stands at more than 1,600 people and businesses. Branches are based around Bath & Bristol, Melksham, Calne & Chippenham, Foxham & Lyneham, Wootton Bassett, Swindon, Cricklade, Shrivenham (West Vale), Wantage (East Vale).

A county boundary change in 1974 transferred the eastern section of the canal from Berkshire to Oxfordshire.

For more details contact: -



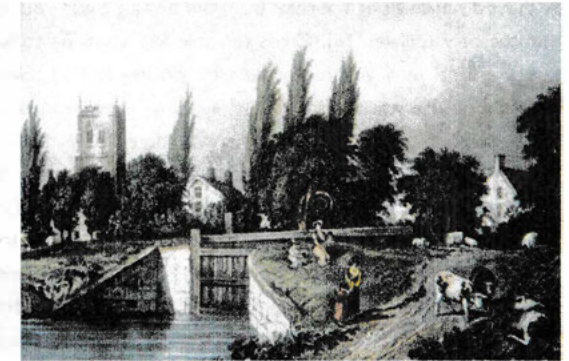
Please Note the representation of any road, track or footpath is not evidence of a right of way. The majority of the canal is on private land. Please keep to the footpaths indicated or signposted.

Please follow the **Country Code** and be sure to leave all gates as you find them.

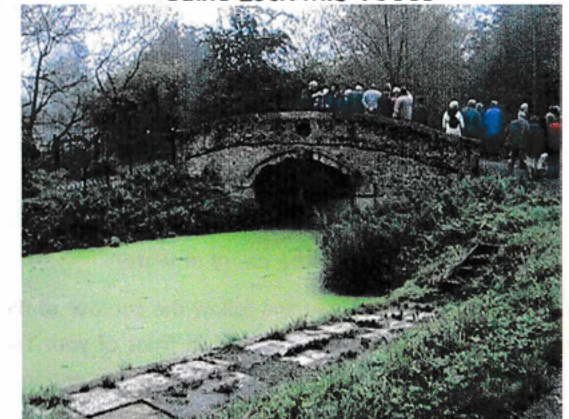


The Wilts & Berks Canal

Calne Canal Trail



Calne Lock mid 1800s



Members standing on Chaveywell Bridge

A walk of about 1 to 1.5 hours along the course of the Wilts & Berks Canal at Calne.

A legacy from the 19th century ...

... an amenity for the 21st.

Calne Canal Trail

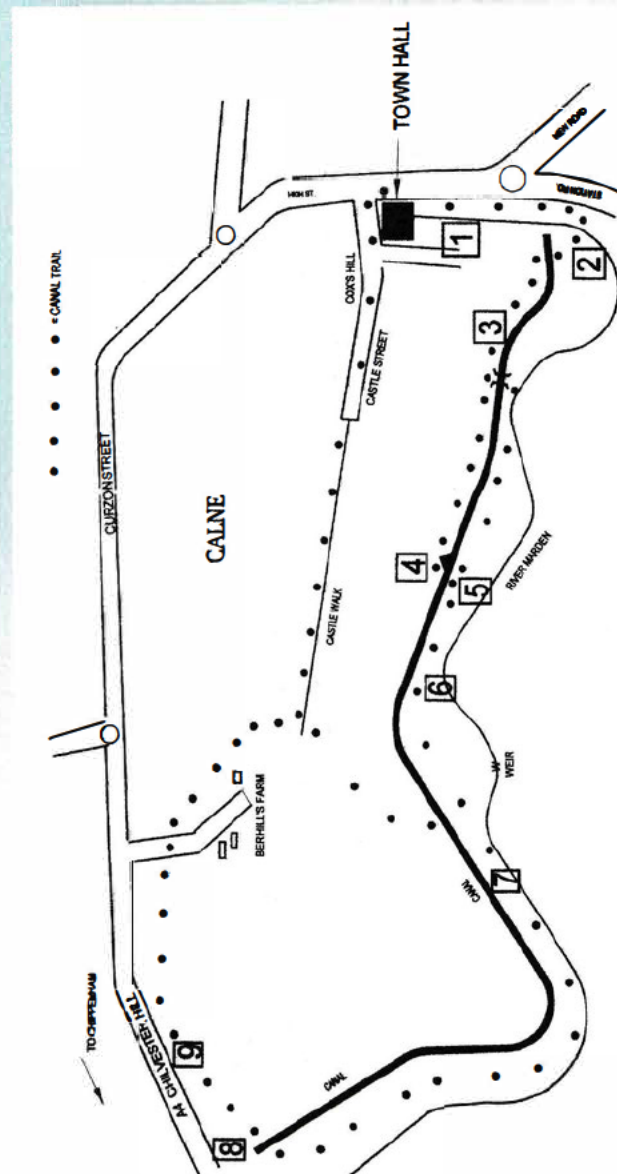
From the Town Hall walk along the River Marden [1] towards Station Road. From Station Road follow the sign for Castle Park, crossing the bridge [2] and the old lock; you are now at the canal side. Continue along the bank, crossing a small spring [3]. Ahead of you is Chaveywell wharf and bridge. From here you can either cross the bridge and walk between the canal and the river or continue down the towpath past the wetland habitat to the turning circle [4] and cross the canal at this point [5].

A short distance along the river from the turning circle you will find the new spillweir [6]. Cross the stile and continue to follow the canal until you reach the weir on the river. Looking across the canal you will see a stile; if you wish you can cross the field and turn right to make your way along this path, Castle Walk, then Castle Street and down Cox's Hill to return to the start of the trail at the Town Hall. If you continue to follow the canal you will notice, to your left, the remains of an old mill [7]. You can identify the line of the canal for a short distance on from this point but after the farm track from Berhills Farm the canal has been completely infilled. The only real evidence of the canal is the occasional tree marking the line of the canal.



A section of the canal in water

At the track, cross the stile and follow the contour of the hill until you can see the main road in front of you. The earthworks between you and the road mark the entrance to the tunnel [8] which took the canal under the road and through the hill beyond. Up the hill to your right you will find a footpath sign and stile near to the road [9]. Do not cross the stile but continue to follow the footpath across the field keeping Berhills Farm to your right. Cross the stile track and you will see another stile across the field to your right. From here a clearly defined footpath will take you to the junction with Castle Walk, as described earlier, and from here Castle Street then down Cox's Hill to the Town Hall.



[1] This is the original location of the Town Wharf. It is interesting to note that cargo was loaded and unloaded on the road side of the canal. [2] This bridge was once the 'hatches' used to control the water level of the river and its junction with the canal. [3] This spring is known as Chavey Well and gives its name to the wharf, bridge and pig farm which used to be on this site. [4] A rule of the canal stated that "No boat shall be navigated upon any part of the canal with the stern foremost (excepting in the passing to the nearest turning place)". The penalty for breaking this rule was 20 shillings (£1.00). [5] This is the recommended route, although the tree between the canal and the riverside walk can be difficult to negotiate.

[6] Built in 1996 this "monster" will control the level of the canal from the town lock to the A4. [7] This is the sight of Moss's Mill. There were 2 mills on the Calne branch; the other, at Hazeland, although not a working mill, is still occupied. [8] The tunnel was approximately 100 yards (91.44 metres) long and was navigated by lying on your back on the top of the barge and "walking" along the roof of the tunnel. The horse was led over the top to meet the barge on the other side. [9] For the more adventurous! Cross the road and head down the hill until you meet a footpath sign on the right. This will take you over the old railway line and the river to the canal and Conigre Locks.



End of the canal just before the river.