

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: -

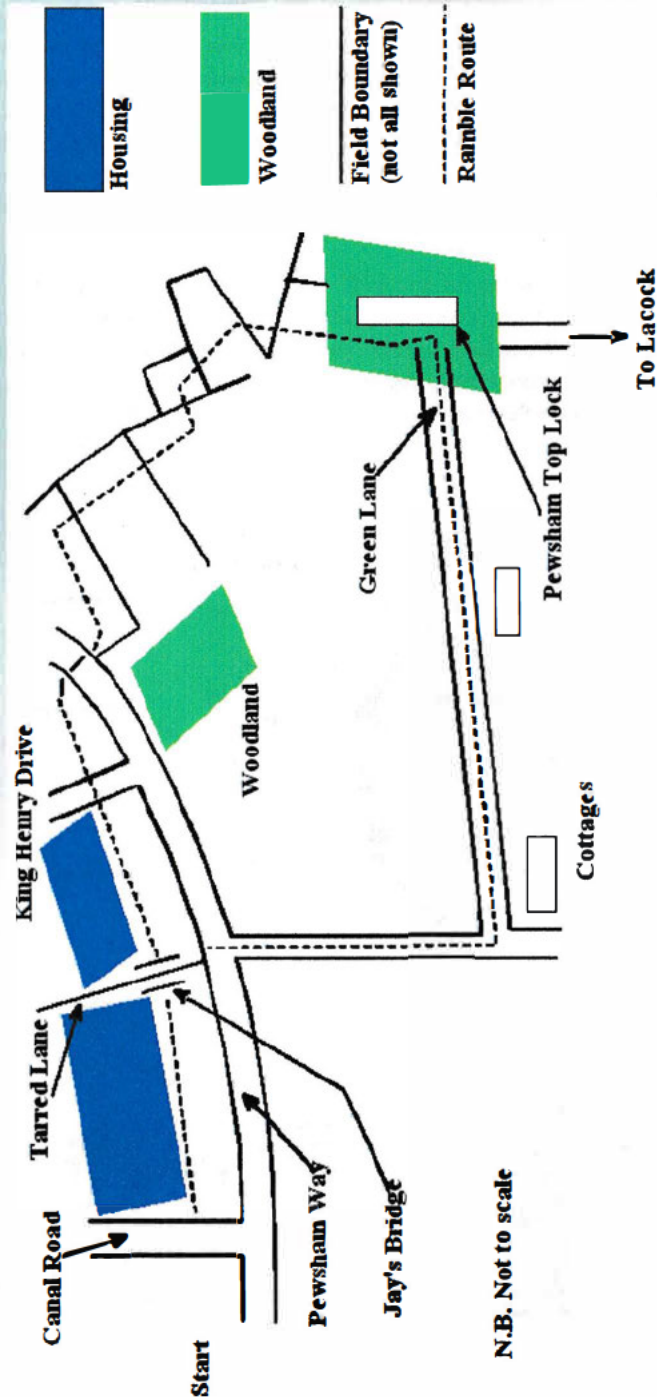
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The Wilts & Berks Canal Trust is a registered charity and non-profit-distributing company limited by guarantee.

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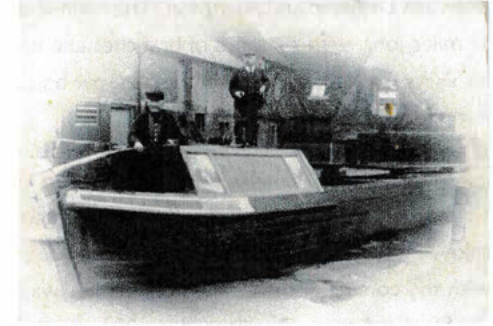
Please Note the representation of any road, track or footpath is **not** evidence of a right of way. The majority of the canal is on **private land**. Please keep to the footpaths indicated or signposted.

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



The Wilts & Berks Canal

Chippenham Canal Trail



Chippenham Wharf mid 1800s



Restoration of Bottom Lock at Pewsham

A legacy from the 19th century ...

... an amenity for the 21st.

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 with seven foot beams, 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.



One of the locks at Pewsham

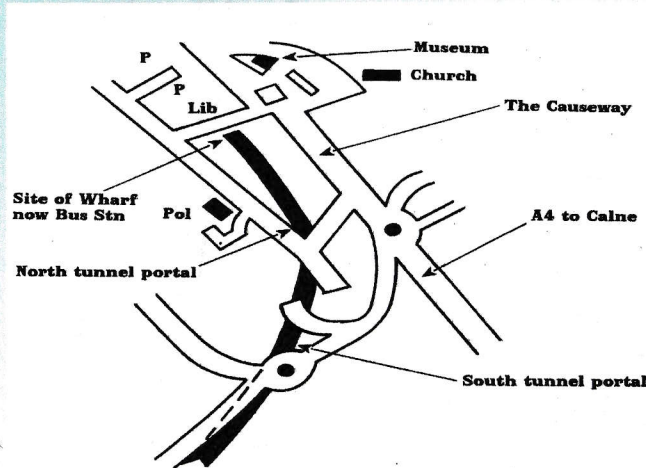
The Chippenham branch ran from a junction off the main canal just north of 3 locks at Pewsham, via a tunnel to the wharf at Timber Street. The main cargo was coal, around 9,000 tons per year at its peak, and the branch also carried salt, sand, agricultural produce, bricks, chimney pots and roof tiles manufactured at the Pewsham brickworks.

Town Centre to Pewsham Estate

(Chippenham Wharf and Tunnel)

Although not part of the walk, this section gives details of the canal in Chippenham. The canal wharf used to be in Timber Street at the site of the bus station. Unfortunately, none of the original buildings survives and the only evidence that there was ever a canal at this location is a small plaque on one of the surrounding walls. However, there is the possibility that the original wharf walls are still intact, buried under the tarmac of the bus station and its car park.

The tunnel used to run through Burlands Road; this was filled-in in 1970. The north entrance was in the public car park at the rear of Thomas's garage in Wood Lane, opposite the Police Station. The south entrance was somewhere in Little Englands, but again nothing is visible. Both Little Englands and Pewsham Way roads are built on the line of the canal.



Cycle path at Pewsham

Canal Road to Pewsham Locks (See map on reverse)

Start at Canal Road, 1st left off Pewsham Way from Town Centre. Please park carefully away from the junction, as this can be busy. About 40 yards up Canal Road on the left are 2 parallel lines of trees; these mark the banks of a deep cutting through which the canal ran.

Cross Canal Road and proceed along the footpath on the landscaped part of the canal. Shortly on the right you will come across a stretch of the canal in water. Continue on until you come to the tarred lane. There is a bridge here called Jays Bridge. You should be able to see part of the stonework at the edge of the road. The canal now passes through private gardens. Turn right onto the lane and join the path 5 yards down on the left hand side. Keep the hedgerow on your left and walk parallel to Pewsham Way. After 1/4 mile, cross King Henry Drive. In approximately 200 yards, at the end of the embankment, carefully cross the main road. Directly ahead of you are further remains of the canal. Continuing parallel to the road follow the hedge, slowly veering to the right.



Top Lock at Pewsham

Turn right at the stile under the overhead cables. Keeping the hedgerow to your left continue on to the next field, passing through the gate directly ahead of you. After 100 yards go through the gateway on the left then, keeping the hedge to your right, cross the corner of the field and go through the next gate. Go straight ahead, cross the field and go over the stile. Cross the corner of the field to the stile, to the right, near the end of the tree line. (This field was the site of the junction between the Chippenham branch and the main canal). Head straight across to the stile at the far right corner of the field, in front of the clump of trees. Cross the stile into the trees, where you will find Pewsham Top Lock. You are now on the main Wilts & Berks Canal. This is private land so please keep to the footpaths. Nearby, on the left hand side, are 2 other locks, giving a rise of 29 feet. These locks were completed in 1798 using 630,000 bricks, fired in kilns on the site. Turn right, away from the lock, and proceed along the green line, passing Middle Lodge Farm on the left. Continue along the tarred road to the junction, after about 1/4 mile, turn right and return to Pewsham Way. Cross over and go through the gate opposite, following the track to the top of the rise, where you turn left and return to Canal Road.