

**Shrivenham Wharf** was not only used for the transfer of cargoes but also contained stables with fresh horses to pull the narrow boats. The largest of which were seventy feet long and seven feet wide and carried up to thirty-four tons. The stone wall by the road is the old back wall of the stable. The towpath changed sides over the Arch Bridge, so that it could pass the Longcot Branch which went to the north, without the need for a further bridge. It then crossed back at Longcot Top Lock to pass the Wantage Branch on the south side.

The **Arch Bridge** is unique in being the only original W&B structure to survive intact to the present day and is still in daily use! The bridge was built in the mid 1840s when Shrivenham Station was built with the arrival of the GWR.

The original bridge that carried the road to Bourton was **Steppingstones Bridge**. The bridge was collapsed in by Faringdon District Council in the 1950s because it had become dangerous.

Branch investigations around Steppingstones Bridge revealed the remains of a small wooden wharf, this was probably a temporary structure built to unload some very heavy loads, probably stones or bricks to be used in the building of a nearby mansion. Bourton Wharf proper and the wharf house can still be seen, at the junction of the Shrivenham bypass with the road to Bourton.

Wildlife to look out for, all seen from time to time along the canal in Shrivenham (some are seasonal)

Fox	Roe deer	Water Vole
Cuckoo	Kingfisher	Heron
Jay	Long tailed tits	Maggie
Moorhen	Woodpecker	Minnows
Newts	Sticklebacks	Tadpoles

**Contact Numbers;**



**Further Reading**

The Wilts & Berks Canal, by LJ Dalby published by Oakwood Press ISBN 0 85361 332X

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WILTS & BERKS CANAL.**

*Condensed from an article by Peter Scatchard, former Chairman W&BCAG*

A committee of potential investors was formed in 1793, a survey of possible routes was commissioned from Robert Whitworth and his son William. With a suitable route identified, a Parliamentary Act granting compulsory purchase and other necessary powers was duly obtained in 1795 and work commenced at the southern extremity of the line later that year. Given the distraction provided by the Napoleonic Wars, it is not surprising that the 52 miles of canal from Semington Junction on the Kennet and Avon Canal to Abingdon on the River Thames Navigation took 15 years to complete, the official opening ceremony being conducted on 14 September 1810.

In addition to providing a route for coal to the London market, the W&B served to bring cheap coal to the market towns of Melksham, Calne, Chippenham, Wootton Bassett, Swindon, Faringdon, Wantage and Abingdon and to Oxford whilst also offering economic transport for the regional export of agricultural produce and such locally produced goods as bricks, building stone, clay pipes etc.

However, the W & B always proved of limited economic value; Kennet and Avon, built as a wide canal offering passage for 14 feet beam boats (compared to the W & B narrow boats with only a seven feet beam) provided a shorter, speedier and more economic route to the London market. The Somerset coalfield rapidly became worked-out. Additionally the rural nature of the region through which the canal passed provided little by way of high-value cargo able to afford the canal fees and dues necessary to repay investors and to leave a surplus adequate for the essential continual maintenance.

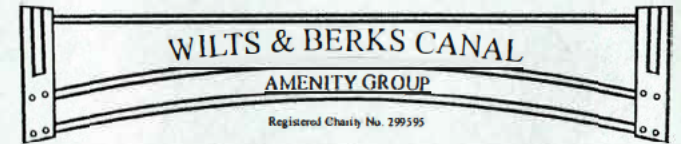
The best times of the W&B canal came in the 1830's, 15 to 25 years after completion - peak revenues and profits for the W&B canal company came about through Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Great Western Railway. The W&B provided an efficient means of transporting the vast quantities of iron, brick, stone, timber and aggregate needed in the building of the railway. Thus did the W&B contribute towards its own eventual and probable inevitable downfall.

So began the slow, steady and inexorable decline of the W&B. As traffic shifted from the canal to railway, tolls and fees tumbled, operating costs had to be slashed to match the falling revenues and essential maintenance was cut, in turn causing further problems, the last boat recorded into Wantage Wharf in the mid 1890's was only able to transport 17 tons compared with the designated limit of 34 tons, due to severe silting up of the channel through lack of dredging.

By 1900 traffic had all but ceased apart from a small number of movements along the south-western end of the canal. One wet and stormy night in early 1901 a four feet section of the Stanley aqueduct simply collapsed out of the roof of one of the arches, and like pulling a bath plug, the water from the canal just ran out, leaving the canal above Lacock high and dry.

It was to be another 13 years before the official Act of Abandonment was passed by Parliament, with the land on which the canal had been built returned or sold to the adjoining landowners.

Today much of the canal remains in good condition, particularly in the rural areas. Major works required consist of the rebuilding of locks bridges wharves, etc. and alternative re-routing has to be considered where post war urban development has occurred.



**WEST VALE BRANCH**



*Costers Bridge at Bourton Wharf - circa 1900  
© Wilts & Berks Canal Amenity Group 1993*

**WEST TRAILS  
from Canalside Park**

**Useful Notes**

First Aid: Elm Tree Surgery, 24 High Street, Shrivenham  
Tel. 01793 782207/784440  
Public Telephone: opposite The Prince of Wales, Shrivenham  
Places to eat  
The Victoria Tavern, Station Road, Tel. 01793 783443  
The Prince of Wales, High Street, Tel. 01793 782268

**Public Notices**

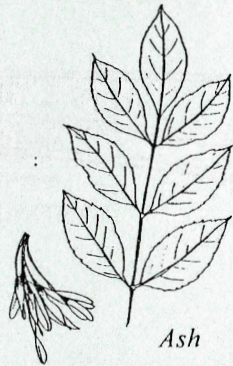
The canal runs through private property, access is given by kind permission of the landowners. Please keep to the designated footpaths.  
Follow the Country Code  
Guard against all risk of fire. Fasten all gates. Keep your dogs under control. Take your litter home. Help to keep the water clean. Protect wild life, plants and trees. Make no unnecessary noise. Be aware of the danger of deep water and overhead power cables. No fishing or kite flying. The W&BCAG cannot accept responsibility for any loss or injury, however caused.

**1998**





Alder



Ash



Blackthorn (sloe)

Trail from Canalside Park to Steppingstones Bridge 1 km (¾ mile)

**Circular Walk 1** (shown ⇄)

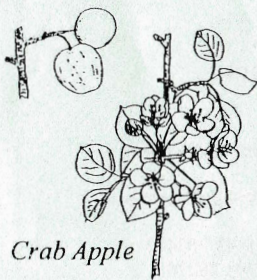
Take the towpath and follow the canal westwards from the Canalside Park. At the Arch Bridge turn left down Station Road to the Victoria Tavern. Take the Bridleway opposite the pub back to Stainswick Lane turn left back to Canalside Park. Approx. distance 2km (1¼ miles)



Bulrush

**Circular Walk 2** (shown >)

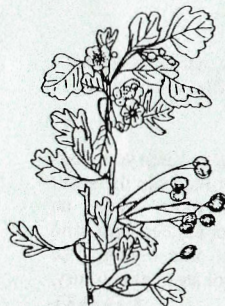
Take the towpath and follow the canal westwards from the Canalside Park, cross the road at the Arch Bridge follow canal to remains of Steppingstones Bridge bear left along Steppingstones Lane bridleway to Bourton. Turn left along Avenue Road, turn left over railway bridge, take bridleway opposite Victoria Tavern to Stainswick Lane turn left for Canalside Park. Approx. distance 3.5 km (2¼ miles)



Crab Apple

**Circular Walk 3** (shown ⇄)

Take the towpath and follow the canal westwards from the Canalside Park, cross the road at the Arch Bridge follow canal to remains of Steppingstones Bridge bear right across canal, bear right taking diagonal across field to Station Road, turn left towards Shrivenham, enter field through small gate on right after 300m follow boundary to Stainswick Lane turn left to Canalside Park. Approx. distance 2.5 km (1¼ miles)



Hawthorn



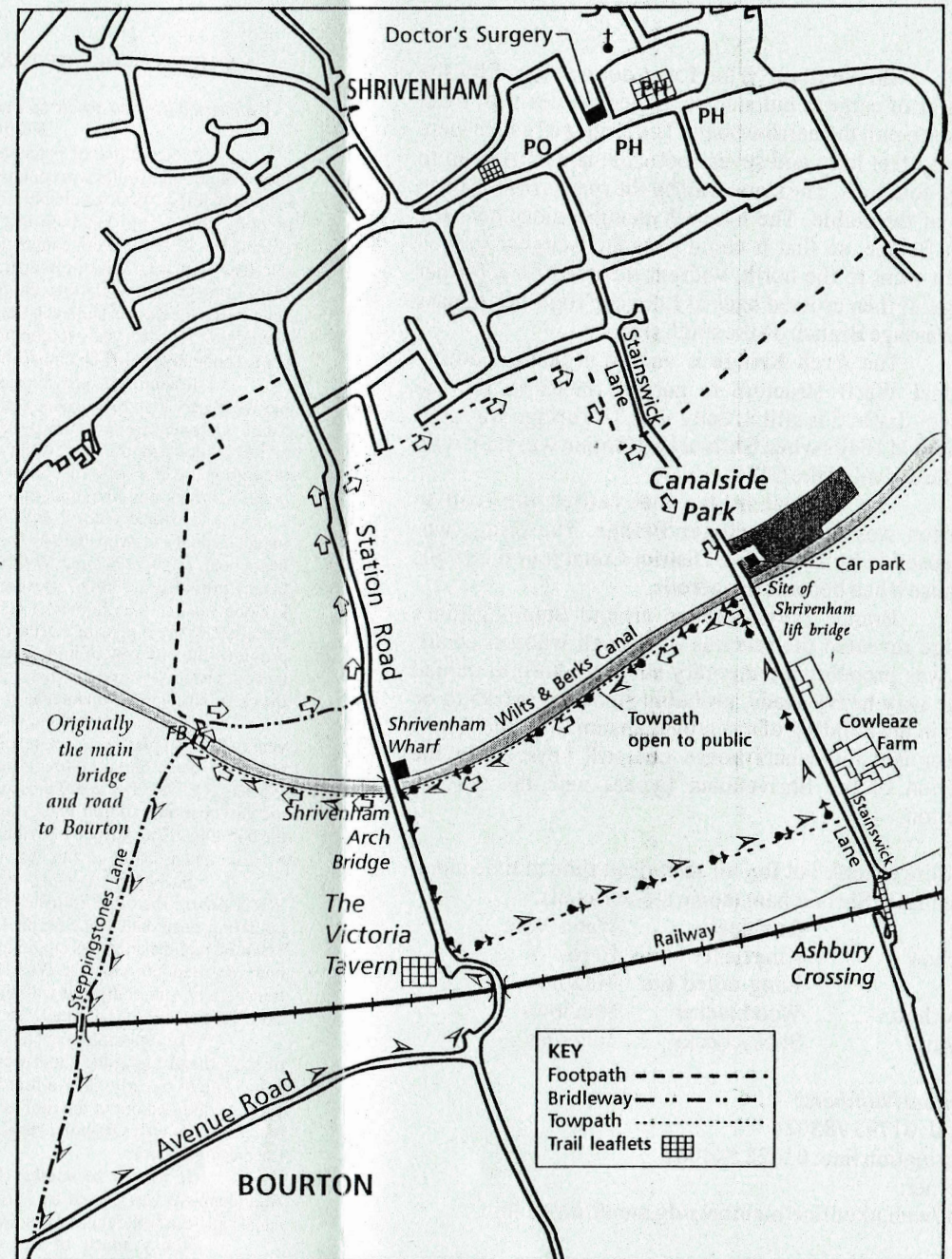
Yellow Iris



Marsh Marigold



Common Reed (Phragmites)



KEY	
Footpath	-----
Bridleway	- - - - -
Towpath	.....
Trail leaflets	▣

