



**Canal &  
River Trust**

Making life better by water

# Nature along the canal

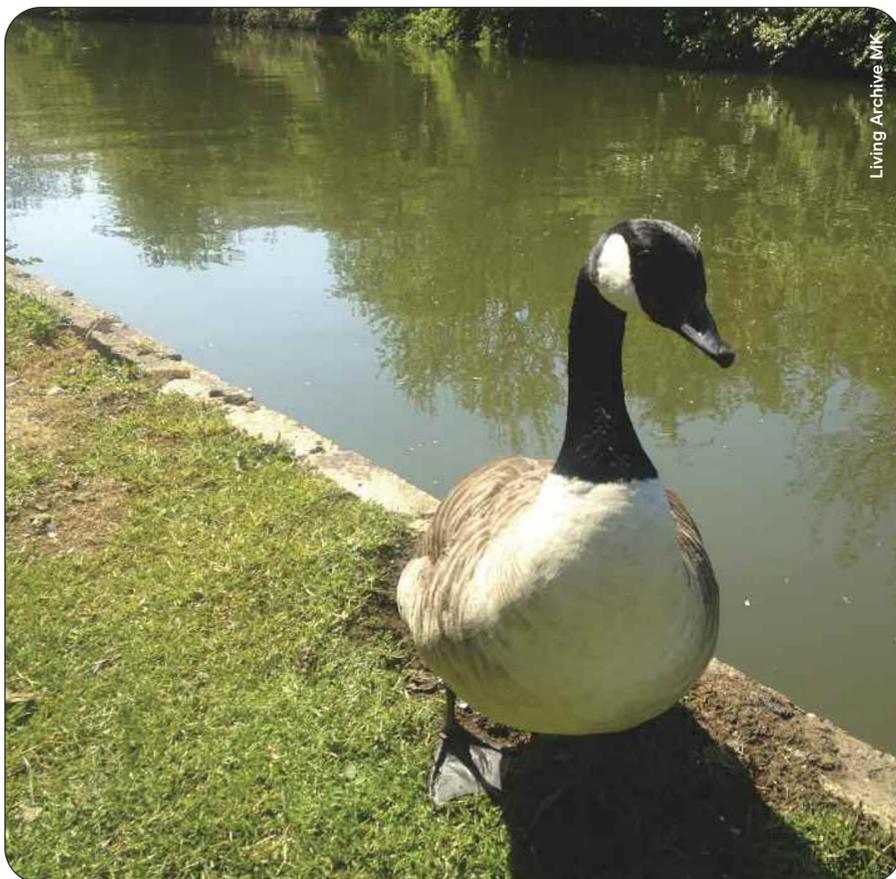
## – a place to enjoy & relax

Canals are special places where you can discover little adventures on your doorstep, on any day of the week – for just a few hours. You can get back to nature by visiting your local canal or river, which is one of the reasons a trip to our waterways can make you happier and healthier.

The Canal & River Trust cares for 2,000 miles of waterways, where you can relax and enjoy boats, bike rides, walks, picnics, history, nature, ducks – and smiles. From Soulbury Three Locks you can explore through quiet countryside right to the edge of modern city of Milton Keynes.

Canals provide a home to all sorts of wildlife from the more everyday ducks, swans and fish to rarer animals such as dragonfly, woodpeckers and beautiful kingfishers which nest in burrows in the banks.

At times you may spot a long-beaked heron, a frog or majestic red kite gliding overhead. At Soulbury at dusk, bats flit around the pumphouse, where they are a protected species. On a smaller scale, look out for ants, butterflies, snails, damselflies and pond-skaters.



*An inquisitive goose isn't shy of the camera*



*Moorhens are common on the Grand Union Canal*



*A heron patiently waits for signs of its next meal*



*A family of ducks in the spring sunshine*



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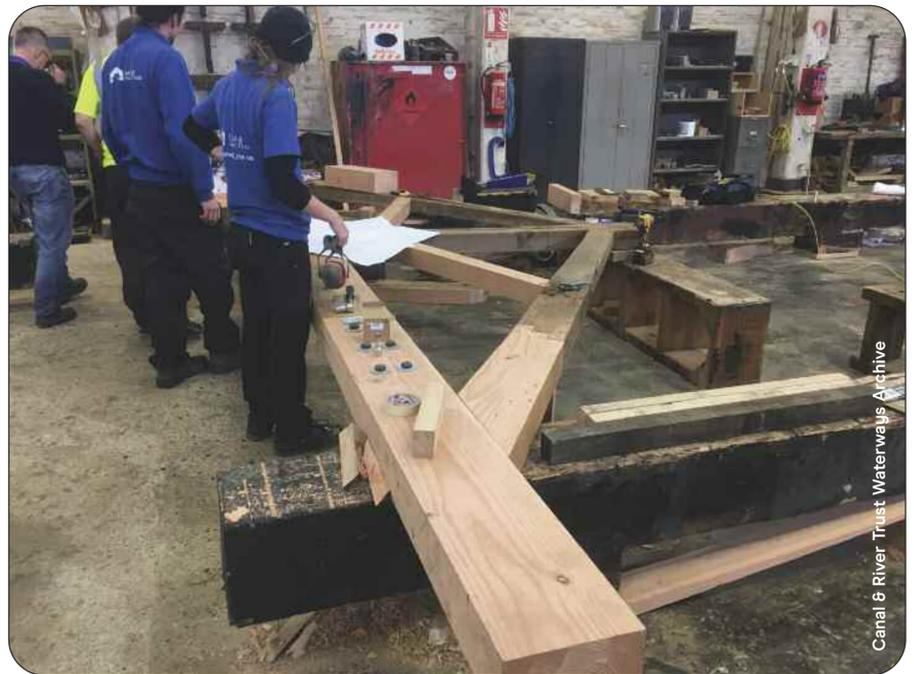
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# Restoration of the Pumphouse

Soulbury Three Locks pumphouse is an important part of Britain's working heritage, now brought back to life. The building fell into disrepair and was placed onto the Local Authority's 'Listed Buildings at Risk' register in 2008, and in early 2014 a project was started to design and progress repairs.

It has been helping to keep the Grand Union Canal topped up with water for almost 180 years – so a structure dating back to 1838 – the year that Queen Victoria was crowned – is still being used today. Thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund this piece of canal heritage has now been restored for generations to come.

Using specialist heritage techniques, Canal & River Trust heritage apprentices have repaired and rebuilt the roof and brick walls. New doors and windows, in keeping with the character of the building, have also been installed.



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Roof trusses being made at the Canal & River Trust workshops

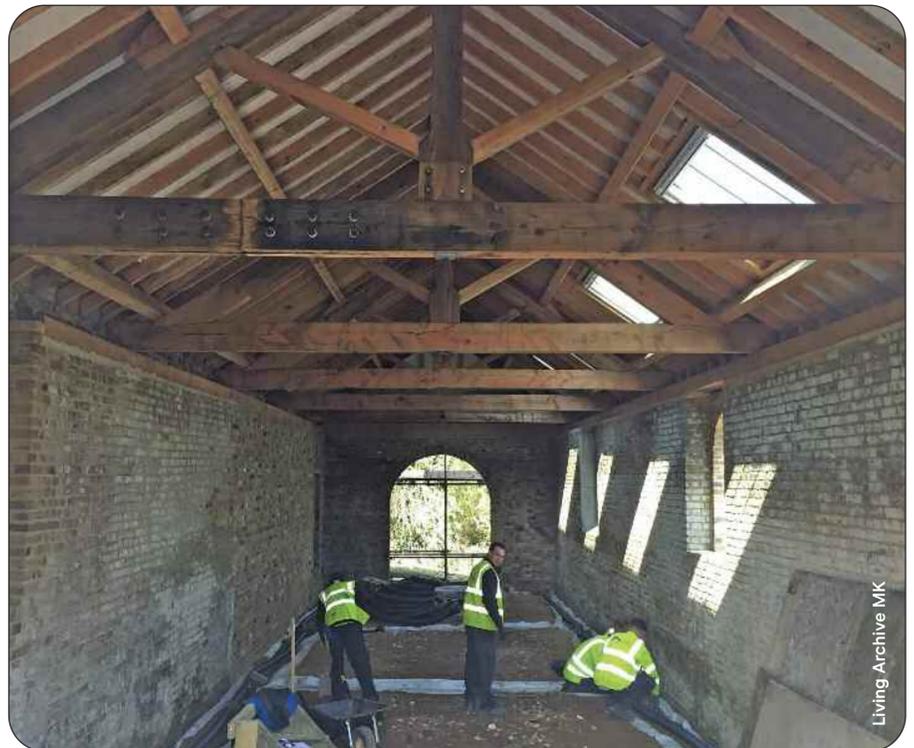
The experience of working on a listed building was invaluable in terms of learning new skills. Being able to work on a masonry project really allowed us all to enhance our own techniques.

It was also thoroughly enjoyable to work as part of such an enthusiastic team, and to work alongside each other as a group of apprentices. Definitely for a lot of us it was a defining project in our training.

Paula Baron – apprentice

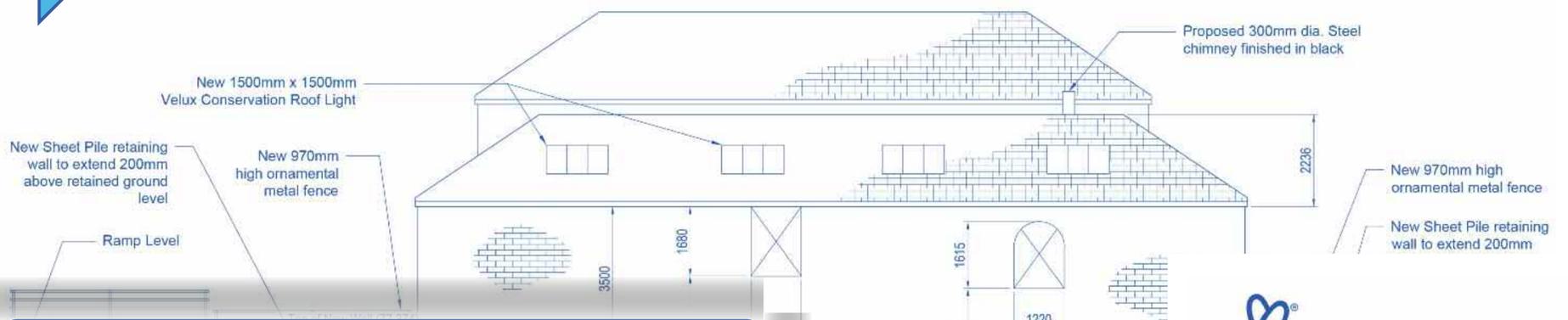
I've been learning stonemasonry, carpentry and bricklaying and I use these skills to repair, restore and conserve. It's nice to understand the history of a building, it's different to a new build. I've always enjoyed it and I have a passion for it.

Daniel Cawley – apprentice



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Inside the Pumphouse, April 2019



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# Soulbury Pumphouse and Canal Trail App

As part of the National Lottery Heritage Fund project, we have developed a walking trail to encourage people to get out and about on foot. This four-mile heritage trail begins at the Three Locks car park at Soulbury and takes you on a leisurely route along the Grand Union Canal to Fenny Stratford, an old Roman settlement now located just inside the Milton Keynes boundary.

Following the canal all the way there is a mix of wildlife, transport heritage, engineering prowess and early 19th-century architecture to be found here. The renovated Soulbury Pumphouse sits at the start of the trail which then follows the canal as it heads north through rural Stoke Hammond towards the Ouzel Valley and the more modern and urban developments of Milton Keynes. Ending at Fenny Stratford it's possible to find a bus back to Soulbury if you are returning to a car parked there, or connect with buses into Milton Keynes or trains to Bletchley or Bedford.



Mark Piliatt

The Three Locks, Soulbury, 2017



Mark Piliatt

The Three Locks, Soulbury, 2017



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Fenny Stratford Lock, 2019



Download the MK Trails App and walk the heritage trail from Soulbury to Fenny Stratford finding out interesting facts along the way. Simply scan the QR code





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The Three Locks, Soulbury, 2017



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# Soulbury Three Locks

Nearly all of today's lock gates follow a design by Leonardo Da Vinci that uses a mitred, 45 degree angle, where the gates meet. This design uses the difference in water pressure on either side of the gate to force them closed as the water levels are changed to lift or lower the boat inside.

Every lock on the canal, like every bridge, has its own number, starting with number 1 at Braunston, 42 miles north of here, where the Grand Junction Canal joins the Oxford Canal. The flight of three locks at Soulbury, numbered 24, 25 and 26, take the canal 6m (20ft) further uphill from its lowest stretch across the Ouse Valley in Milton Keynes up to Tring summit at 121m (395ft) above sea level.

As well as using the pumphouse to return water upstream the locks at Soulbury also have side ponds. These were used to capture some of the water that would otherwise be lost downstream when the lock is opened. When the lock was refilled to allow the next boat to pass through, the water in the side pond could be used instead of filling the whole lock from the pond above. Although these water saving devices are no longer in use they, and their sluice gate gear, are still clearly visible alongside the towpath.



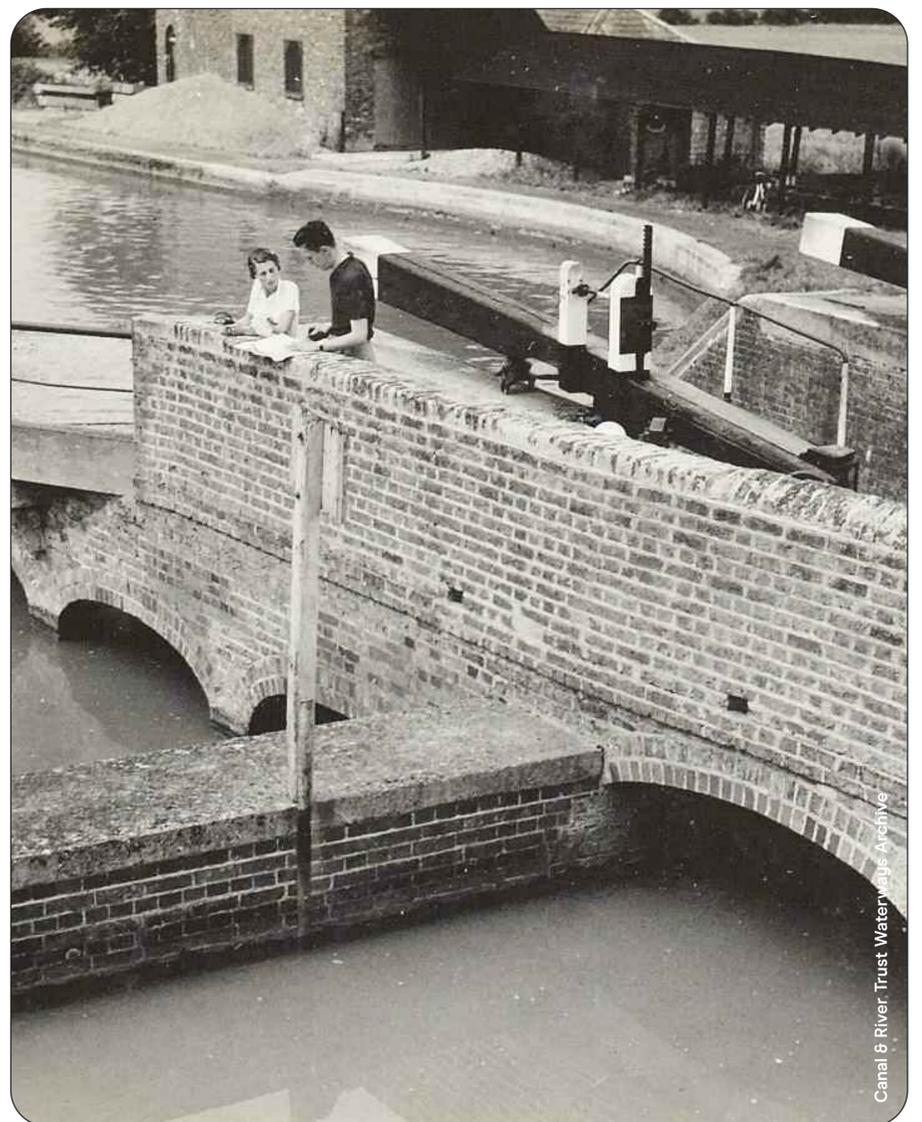
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*The Three Locks, Soulbury*



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*The Three Locks, Soulbury, c1930s*



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*The Three Locks, Soulbury, 1937*



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*The Three Locks, Soulbury*



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# The history of canals

Before the railways and good roads, narrowboats were used to transport heavy goods like coal, timber, gravel and fragile items such as pottery.

As industry and the need for raw materials increased, the country needed more efficient and safer ways to carry supplies.

Canals linked the growing industrial cities of the Midlands and the North with sea ports and major rivers such as the Thames. This made foreign trade and selling goods in London enabling higher prices to be fetched.



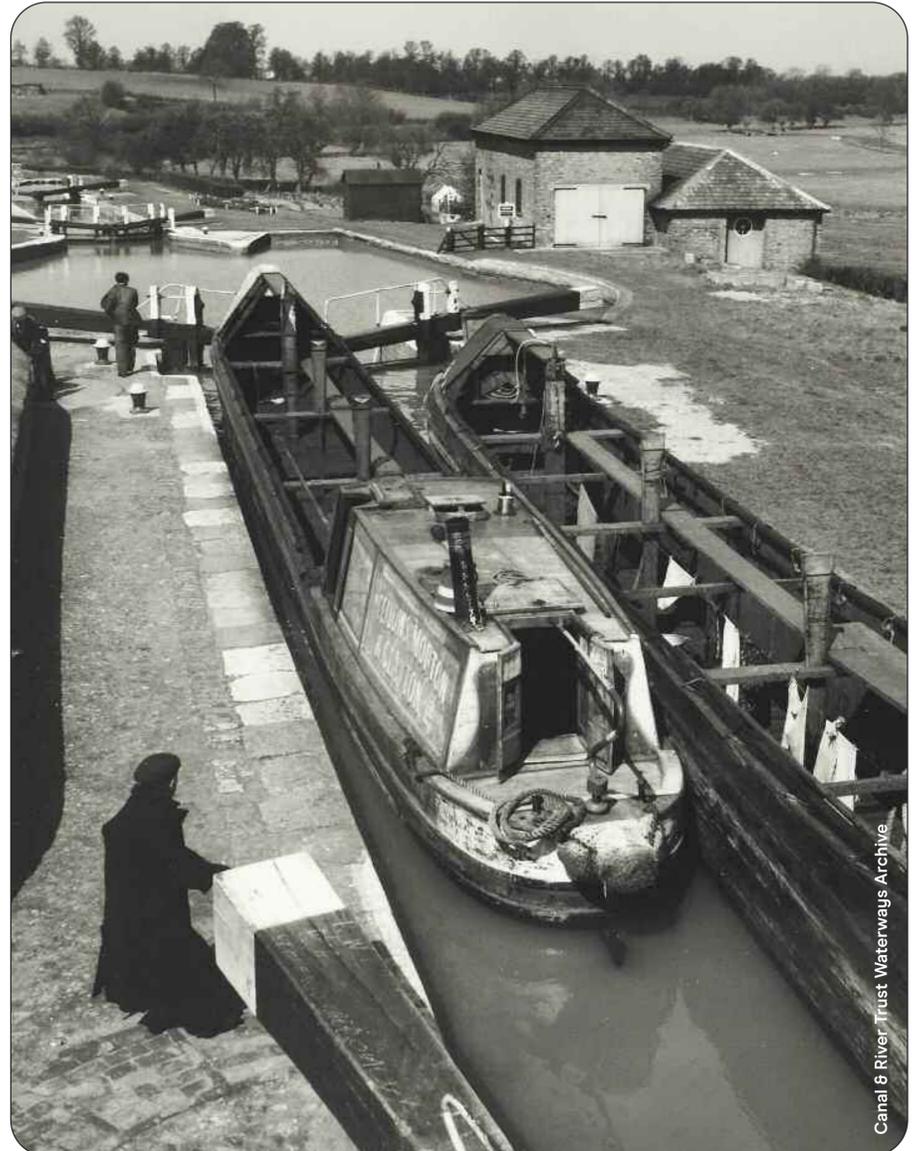
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Wyvern Shipping Company boat trip, c1950s



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The Three Locks, Soulbury, c1950s



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The Three Locks, Soulbury, c1950s

## Working the canals

**Toll keeper** – ‘gauged’ the boats using a stick to measure their depth in the water and took tolls.

**Lock keeper** – often lived in a cottage next by the canal to be ready to let boats through locks.

**Bargemen** – worked on loading and unloading, steering and maintaining the boats. They used to ‘leg’ the boat through tunnels, lying on their back and stepping along the roof.

**Boat families** – Whole families lived in small cabins and children led the horses on the towpaths. Large caps or bonnets protected their faces from the cold wind, dirt, rain and sun as they worked outdoors all year.

**Horses** – pulled the barges in the days before engines, using the towpaths and eating hay or grass.

In 1968, the Transport Act officially recognised the leisure value of canals. Since then they have been owned and managed by Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways). Canal & River Trust’s role is to look after and bring to life the waterway network – promoting the wellbeing of people who live near or visit the canals.



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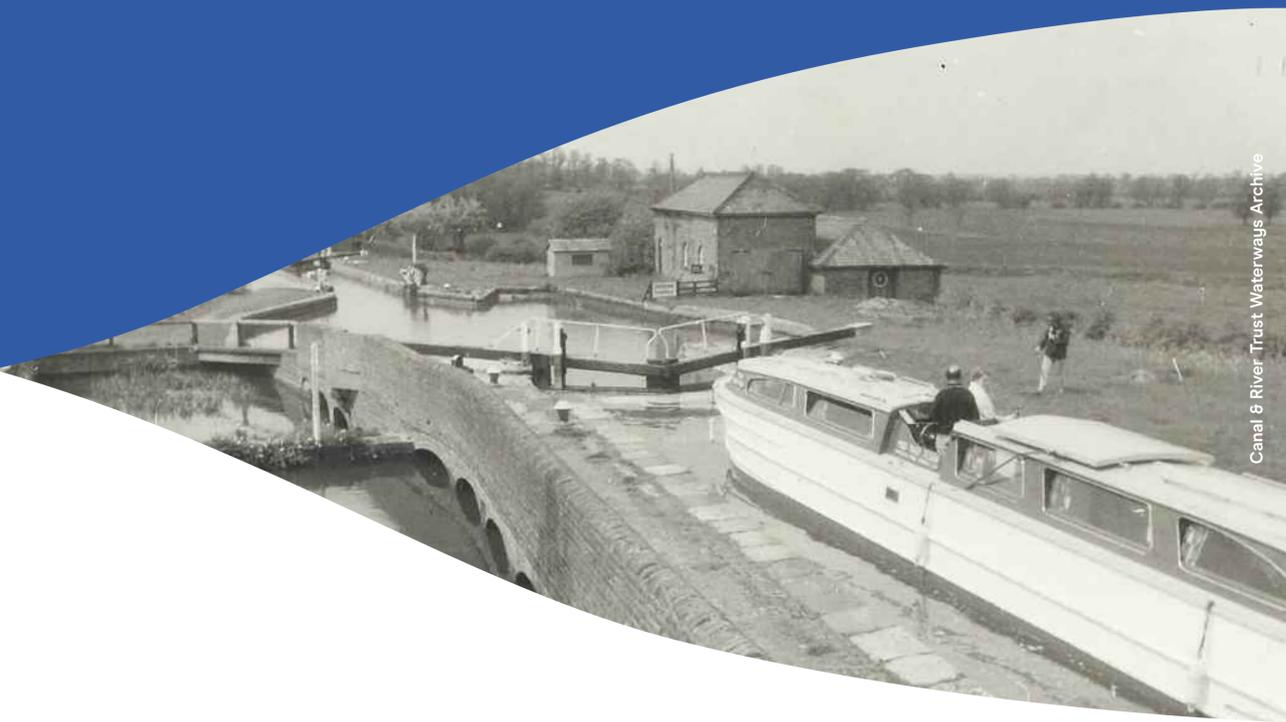
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# The Soulbury Pumphouse

The Soulbury pumphouse was built in 1838 and listed Grade II in 1984. It was renovated in 2019 by Canal & River Trust, in partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The pumphouse now contains an electric pump which plays a vital role in keeping the Grand Union Canal open and is one of a series located along the canal. Without these pumps, the canal would run out of water during the busy summer boating season.

When a boat passes through a lock, a large volume of water is used. Unless that water is replaced the canal would eventually dry out. When the Grand Junction Canal, which would later become the Grand Union, opened in 1800 a series of reservoirs were built to collect water from streams and rivers. These reservoirs were used to keep the water levels high enough for boats to stay afloat. But if there were a lot of boats using the locks, or there was a drought, these water supplies could dry up and traffic would be brought to a standstill.

A series of nine pump houses like this one at Three Locks, known as 'the Northern Engines', were operational by 1841. Each housed a steam powered pump that drew water up from below the lock and pumped it through a tunnel, back to the pound above the lock.



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*The Three Locks, Soulbury, c1950s*



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*Volunteer lock keeper, Soulbury, 2019*



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*Soulbury Locks, 1968*



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*Soulbury Pumphouse, 1968*



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# Canal Art and cabin life

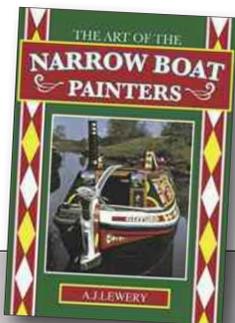
Men, women and their families working the canals in the 1800s were very proud of their narrowboats. These were also their tiny floating homes, with cabins that measured only two metres (six feet) wide by three metres (nine feet) long.

As well as giving each barge a distinctive name, they were brightly painted with polished brass and scrubbed woodwork inside. Cabins were neat with lace curtains and china plates, perhaps to make up for an itinerant and harsh lifestyle outside.

By the mid to late 1800s, families spent their lives moving from place to place, with little chance of having an education or much welcome from villages and towns they passed through. The bargees worked hard against new competition from railways, so their families were their unpaid workers.

'Roses and Castles' is the name given to this canal-style art. Designs often included cottages, churches, rivers and lakes too, but they generally have a distinctive colour palette of green, gold and red.

A book by Tony Lewery tells the whole story of this unusual folk art, 'The Art of the Narrow Boat Painters' published in 2005.



Examples of painted canal folk art



Traditionally painted narrow boats



Family life on the canal



A young girl leads the working horse along the towpath



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# Canals today

Today most people see canals as a place of leisure – for walking, boating, cycling, fishing and enjoying their industrial history and wildlife.

Canal & River Trust is the charity who look after and bring to life 2,000 miles of waterways. Its research shows that just being near water can help you feel content and relaxed so what better place to spend time than along your local canal? When you step off the pavement and onto the towpath you step into a whole new world.

## FACT FILE:

Over **8 million people** live within 1 kilometre of a canal or river.

Around **3,200 km** (2,000 miles) of waterway are operated by the Canal and River Trust.

Most canals were built between **1750** and **1840**, during the Industrial Revolution.

## Get involved! It's easy as 1-2-3:

1. Discover which waterways are close to you and find out about exciting events and activities in your area: [canalrivertrust.org.uk/local-to-you](http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/local-to-you)
2. Share your canal photos! Adults can find us on social media using [@canalrivertrust](https://www.instagram.com/canalrivertrust) and share pictures using [#lifesbetterbywater](https://www.instagram.com/hashtag/lifesbetterbywater)
3. Join our volunteers: they help keep their local canal special and enjoy health benefits by keeping active. Offer a little or a lot of time and find out more at: [canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer](http://canalrivertrust.org.uk/volunteer).

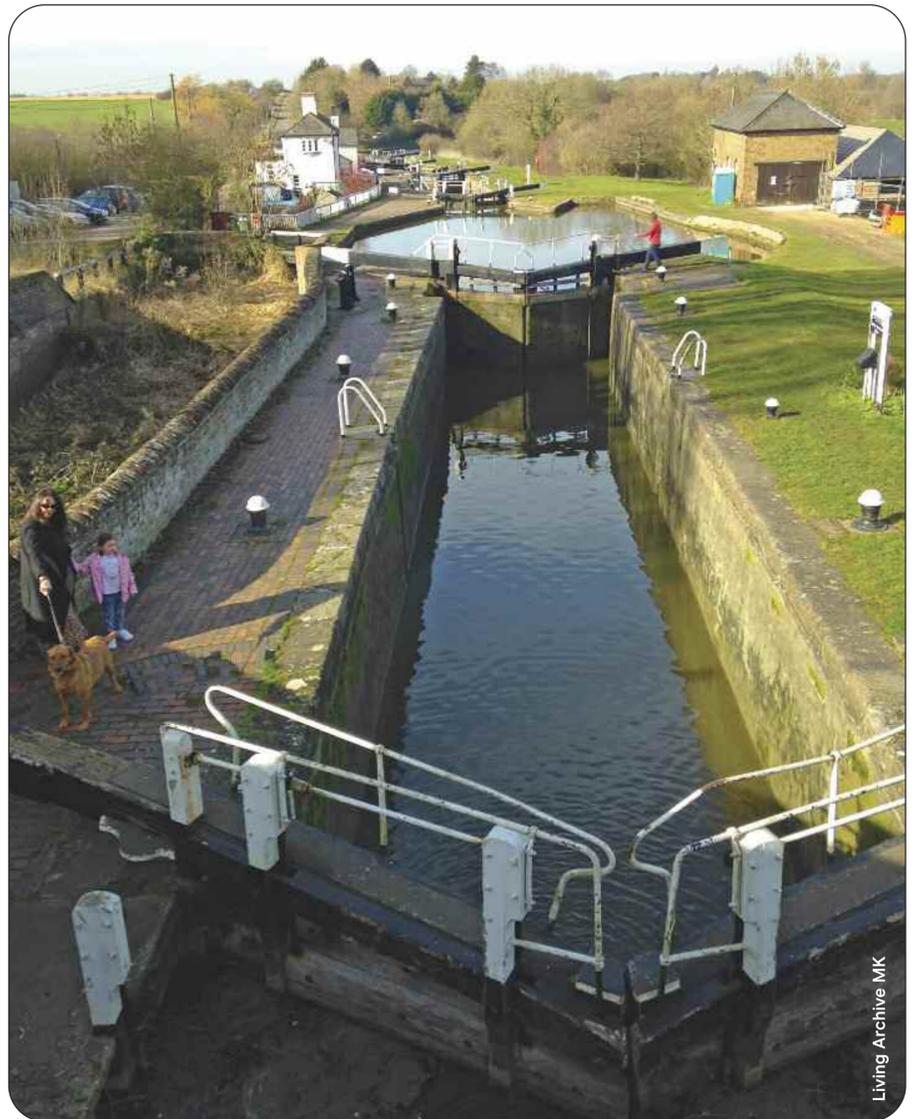


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Following the tow path to Soulbury



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The Three Locks, Soulbury, 2019



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# Heritage skills

During the course of the restoration, Canal & River Trust apprentices learnt how to use lime mortar. Lime mortar is created by mixing sand, quicklime and water. It has been used for centuries to bond together brick and stone in all types of buildings.

A special mix was created for the pumphouse after samples were sent away and analysed and matched for certain aggregates.

The roof trusses were made at the Canal & River Trust workshops. They have been constructed from Douglas Fir and matched the original timberwork.

It is important to preserve a place like this because obviously it is Grade II Listed. Canal & River Trust is responsible for the building. It was at risk of falling down when we came here and the brickwork was in tatters. There was no roof on the building. We have managed to reinstall that. We have used a lot of apprentices on this job to train to use lime mortars and to construct the timber work for the roof. It has been very important for us not only for the reason of restoring the building but obviously for training for our apprentices.

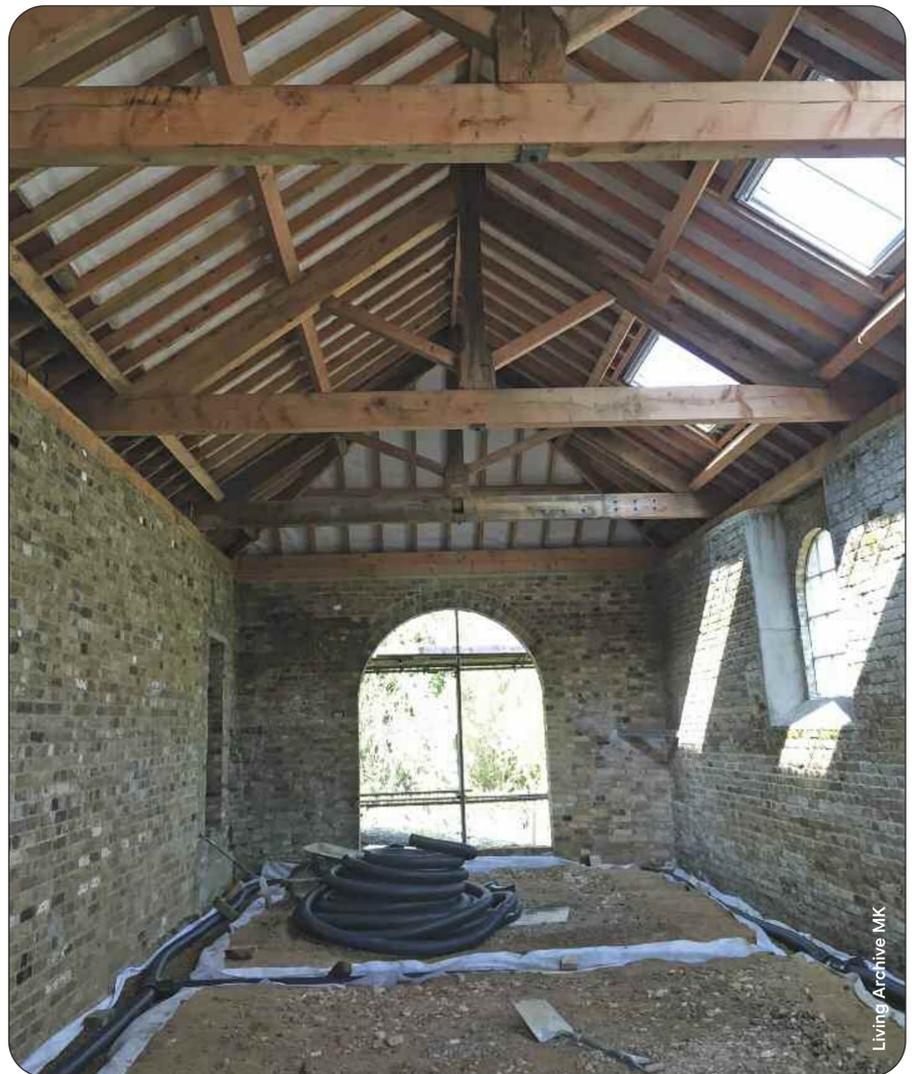
Graham Smith – Construction Manager



Daniel indicating where the lime mortar has been used



Daniel Crawley, apprentice (left), with Graham Smith, Construction Manager



The newly installed roof trusses in the pumphouse, 2019



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