

# Waterway to Wendover



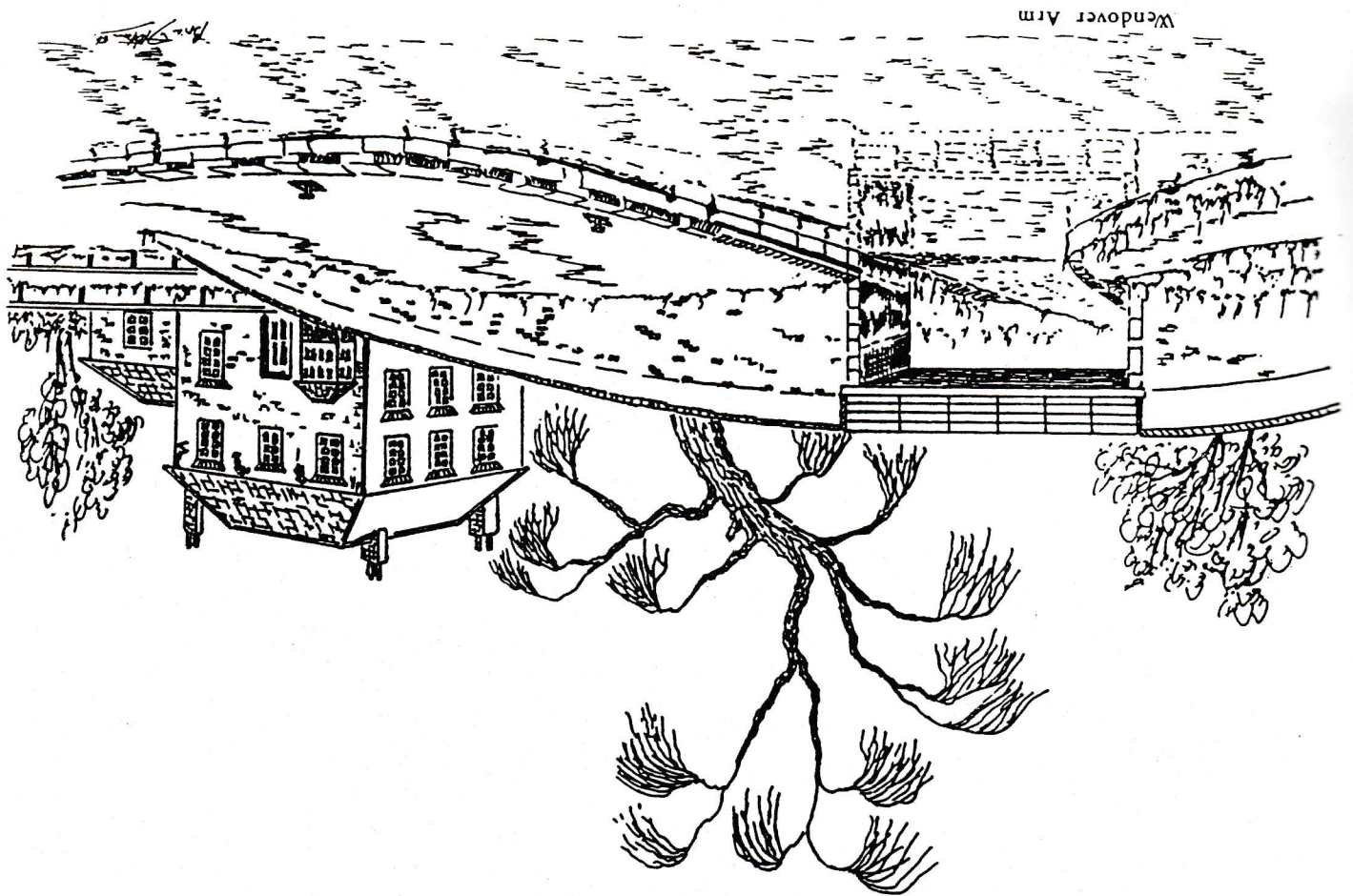
A Study by the Wendover Arm Group



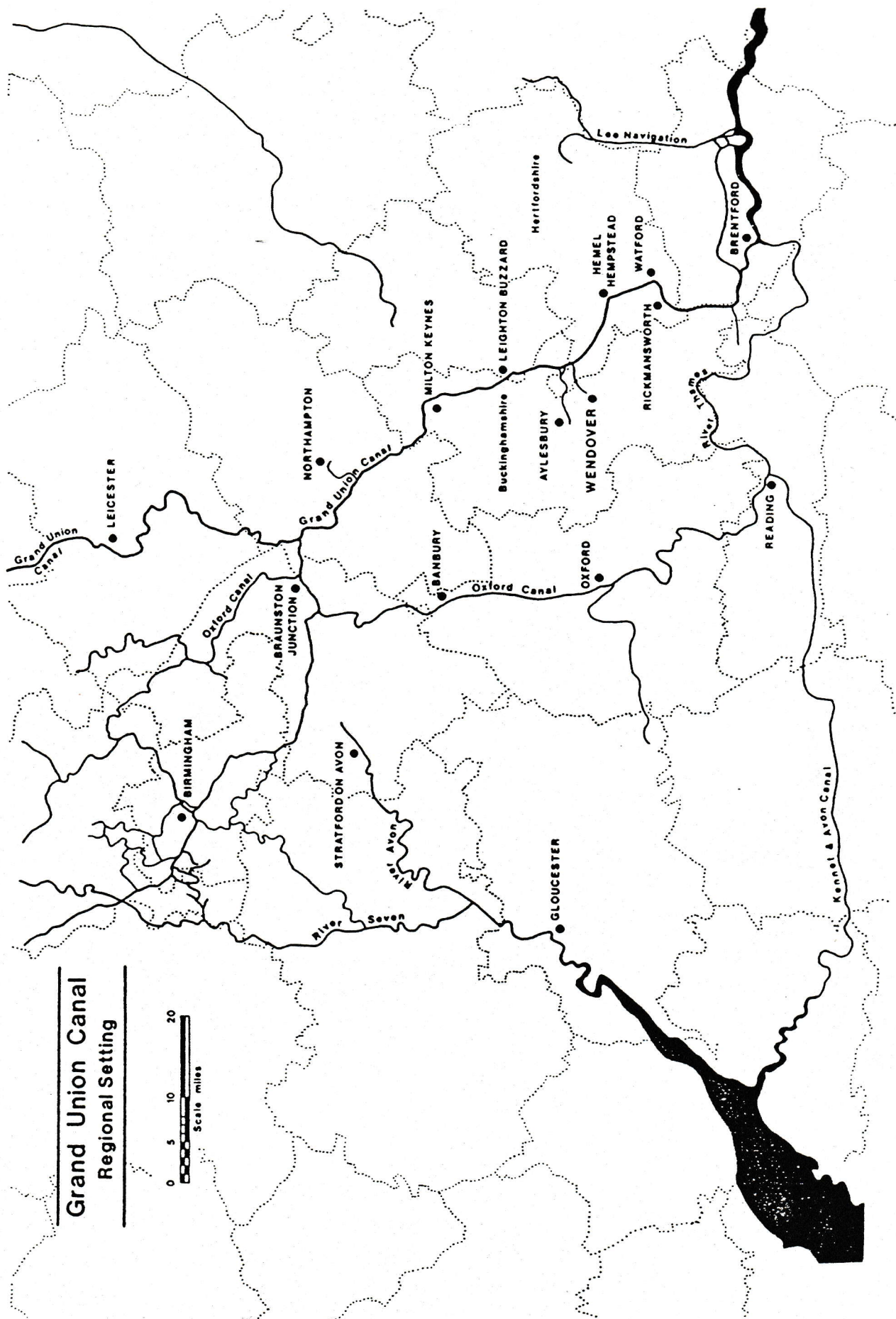
# Waterway to Wendover

A Study of the amenity benefits arising from restoration of the

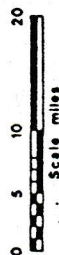
Wendover Arm of the Grand Union Canal



Entrance to the Wendover Arm



**Grand Union Canal  
Regional Setting**



## FOREWORD

To a nation whose trading success was built on sending a large number of its people to sea, it cannot come as a surprise that long after their main economic justification has passed, the canal system of this country still evokes great enthusiasm from a large number of devotees. Water and its use for recreational pursuit is ingrained deeply in our national psyche.

As an asset, our canals, travelling as they do through very beautiful parts of our countryside and often unspoilt by the clutter of modern development which has harmed so many of our towns and villages, attract people of all ages and social classes.

This booklet is aimed at bringing this heritage to the attention of more people and I commend it to you.

ROBERT B. JONES, M.P.

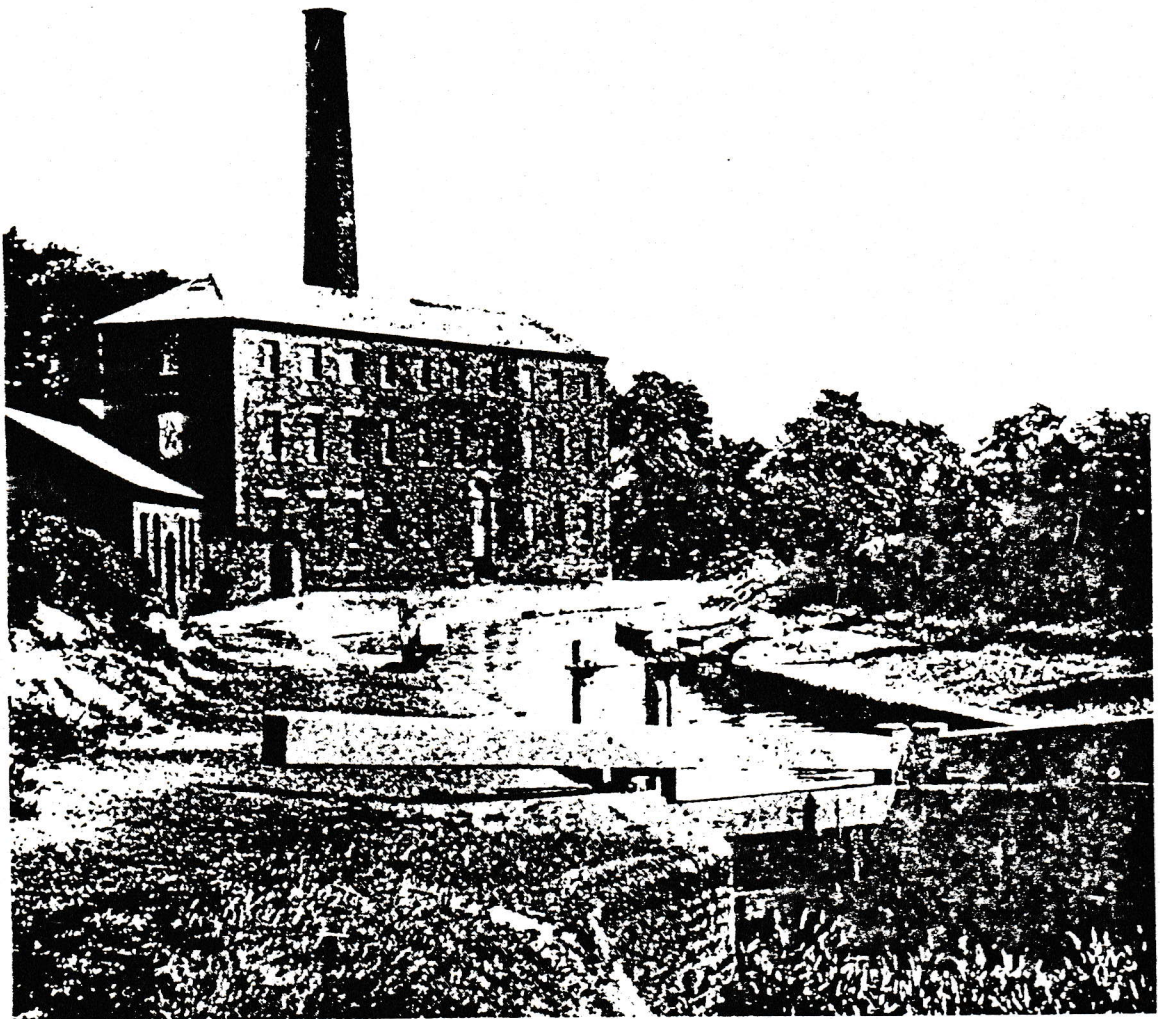
HOUSE OF COMMONS

October 1986

Mr Jones is Member of Parliament for Hertfordshire West, Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Waterways Group and a member of The Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council.



Tringford Pumping Station Circa. 1920





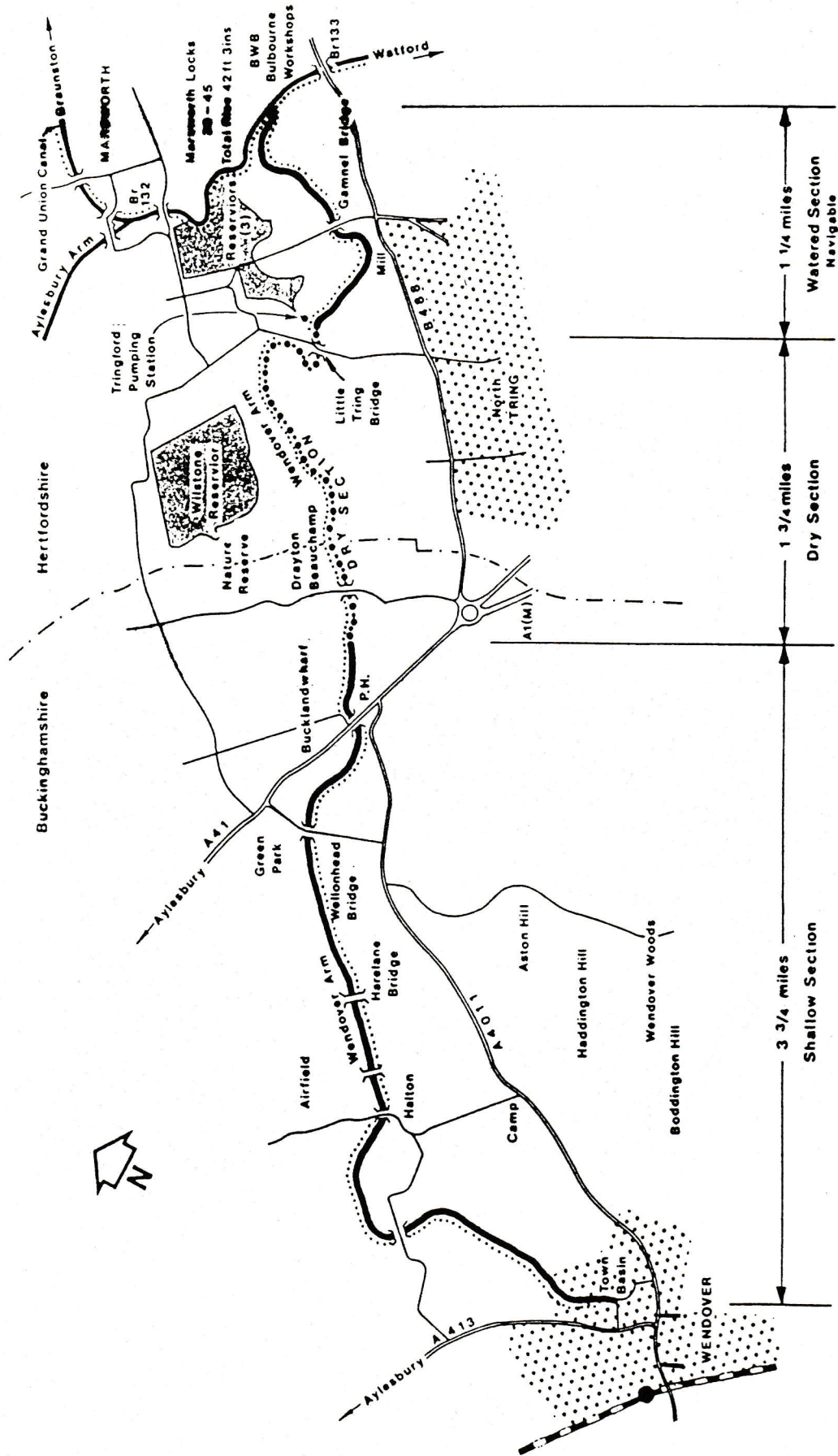
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# The Wendover Arm





## 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE WENDOVER ARM.

### 1.1 HISTORICAL NOTES

The original Act for the Grand Junction Canal (1793) provided for a feeder channel to supply water from the rising springs at Wendover to the Tring summit level. However, before it was completed it was realised that the feeder could be made a navigable arm at only a marginal increase in cost. Provision was made in the second Grand Junction Canal Act of 1794 for this change and the Arm was completed in 1796.

In 1932 the Grand Junction Canal became part of the Grand Union Canal Company through the amalgamation of a number of canal companies. This then provided a comprehensive canal network linking London to the industrial Midlands.

The Grand Union Canal and the older Oxford Canal remain the only two navigable waterways connecting London to the Midlands and hence to the North of England. Of the two, the Grand Union is the more direct by some 60 miles. The navigation from London via Oxford was a notoriously unreliable route dependent upon the state of the River Thames and was limited to boats of seven foot beam. The Grand Junction Canal, although originally built with narrow locks, was subsequently uprated to a "wide" canal. Its locks and bridges were then wide enough to take 70 ton Thames barges, 72 feet long by 14 feet 3 inches wide, or two canal narrowboats side by side.

Like every other canal, water is "lost" from the summit level every time the locks at either end of it are used, unlike the sections lower down which lose and gain water in more or less equal quantities as boats pass through them. As the volume of traffic along the main canal increased a more plentiful supply of water was therefore needed and over a number of years the now famous Tring reservoirs were built.

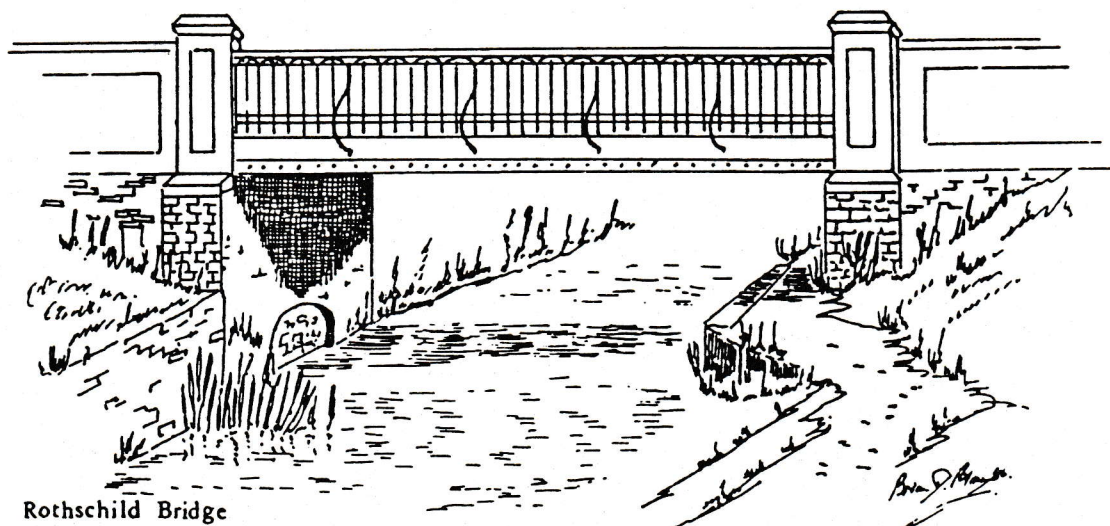
This group of reservoirs is located on the northern slopes of the Chiltern Hills with a complex series of interconnections. A pumping station at Little Tring enables water from the reservoirs to be fed into the Wendover Arm from where it flows into the main line of the Grand Union Canal. Of interest to waterway historians, the windows of the pump house were originally installed in the engine room of the Foxton Inclined Plane.

From 1802 onwards there was a succession of leakage problems from the arm and many attempts made to cure them. In 1897 temporary stop planks were put in at Little Tring and as a result the water level on the summit immediately improved thus proving that the arm was actually taking water from the main canal. A "stop-lock" (which can still be seen today) was then constructed at that point in order to allow navigation whilst reducing the water loss from the summit.



In 1904 the bed of the arm from Wendover to Drayton Beauchamp was repaired using clay puddle from the sides of the canal and the water level lowered. At Drayton Beauchamp the water was diverted via the Drayton feeder to the Wilstone reservoir and the canal between Drayton and Little Tring stop-lock drained.

However, pumping from the low level of the reservoir proved very expensive and in 1910 the existing arrangement was constructed. The Wendover water is now culverted under the dry section to the Tringford reservoir from where the pumping station returns it to the canal.



## 1.2 LOCATION OF THE WENDOVER ARM

The Wendover Arm links the town of Wendover in Buckinghamshire (O/S grid reference SP 870 083) to the Grand Union Canal at Bulbourne, Hertfordshire (O/S ref. SP 929 138).

It is situated almost 400 feet above sea level and is within the Chiltern Hills which are classified as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## 1.3 PRESENT STATE OF THE WENDOVER ARM

From Bulbourne the arm is navigable for one and a quarter miles and passes New Mill, once the site of William Meads' windmill and the Bushell Brothers' boatyard. Today's enlarged and modernised mill is operated by Heygates Ltd. The current limit of navigation is at the stop-lock near the Tringford pumping station. The next section of one and three quarter miles has been drained of water but the canal bed remains clearly defined for all but one hundred yards or so. These two sections skirt the Tring reservoirs which have now become a National Nature Reserve due to the abundant bird life that gathers there.

The remaining section of three and three quarter miles is in water but at reduced depth. However this is a scenically superb stretch of canal and a delight to walk or canoe. The major obstacles to navigation by powered canal craft, apart from the water level, are the low level bridges for the A41 at Bucklandwharf and the road crossing at Halton.

The Inland Waterways Association (Hertfordshire Branch) and the Grand Union Canal Society together with the British Waterways Board and a Manpower Services Commission Scheme have cleared the bed of the dry section and improved the towpath over almost the full length of the arm. Access to the arm is therefore very good for walkers.

## 2. THE WENDOVER ARM GROUP.

### 2.1 WATER TO WENDOVER CAMPAIGN.

The Inland Waterways Association's 1985 National Rally at Milton Keynes saw the launch of the Water to Wendover Campaign by the Grand Union Canal Society. The G.U.C.S. organised a meeting, inviting all groups, societies and individuals with an interest in the past, present and future of the Wendover Arm to air their views to representatives of the British Waterways Board on October 2nd 1985 at the Rose and Crown Hotel, Tring.

The meeting was a great success with virtually all those invited attending. It was chaired by Mr Illyd Harrington J.P., President of the Grand Union Society, ex B.W.B. member and ex Chairman of the Greater London Council. British Waterways were represented by Mr David Telford, Manager of Engineering Operations and Mr Robin Garrett, London Area Engineer.

The meeting closed with the feeling that some form of Wendover Arm Development Society be formed by all the contributing groups and societies to co-ordinate their individual efforts and create one concerted campaign.

The Wendover Arm Group was thus formed and consists of representatives from many separate organisations. A full list of members is shown in Appendix A.

The primary purpose of The Wendover Arm Group is to seek the rewatering of the dry section of the arm to a standard which would allow full navigation to the A41 road bridge, and to ensure that the remaining section to the site of the original Wendover Town Basin is conserved as a local amenity. The aims of the Group are stated in full on the next page.



## 2.2 AIMS OF THE WENDOVER ARM GROUP.

- i) To seek full restoration for navigation from Tringford Pumping Station to the A41 road crossing. This is taken to mean a minimum 3ft draught, 7ft beam and the provision of winding (turning) facilities close to the A41 for a full length narrow boat.
- ii) To seek conservation of the canal between the A41 and Wendover to maximise its amenity value and prevent any further deterioration of the canal infrastructure.
- iii) To seek the widest possible views of the local community towards the future of the Arm through local voluntary and governmental organisations, press coverage, meetings etc.
- iv) To provide a contact point with the British Waterways Board and obtain their assessment of the technical, water resource, cost, regulatory and other implications of the various options.
- v) To produce discussion documents as necessary, making recommendations for action.
- vi) To negotiate commitments of financial, human and other resources that may be called upon to carry out the agreed plan.
- vii) If additional financial resources are required, to consider the formation of a Trust or other formally constituted body to mount a fund raising campaign and administer the resulting monies.
- viii) To assist and promote the implementation of the agreed plan through to completion and ensure that ongoing maintenance of the canal is assured.



### 3. AMENITIES PROVIDED BY RESTORATION OF THE ARM.

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Although the original purpose of canals was to provide a means of transporting goods all over the country, they are little used for this today. It is generally accepted that canals will now primarily be used for leisure, from angling to zoology. With the increasing amount of leisure time enjoyed by the population as a whole it is more important than ever to ensure recreational facilities and open spaces are maintained and improved.

A restored Wendover Arm will provide such a facility for the enjoyment of many pursuits, including :-

#### 3.2 ANGLING

The arm has a very large potential for angling. Current experience shows the effective catchment area for an enlarged fishery to include not only the local communities of Tring, Wendover and surrounding villages but also larger towns such as Aylesbury, Chesham and Hemel Hempstead. In addition the demand for competitive angling can be expected to attract many anglers from as far as London.

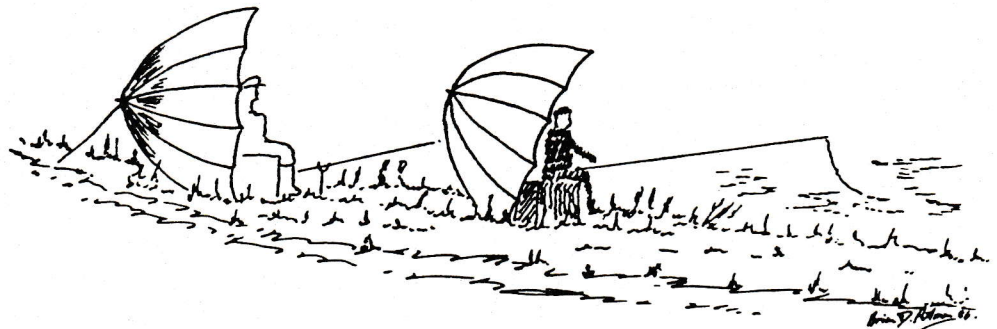
The length of the Wendover Arm from Tringford pumping station to the Grand Union Canal main line at Bulbourne is managed by The Tring Anglers and is visited by an average of 20 anglers per week, which figure is increasing year by year.

Good accessibility to the canal bankside for the less mobile members of the public has made the arm increasingly popular throughout the week, particularly with elderly fishermen. Juniors, prevalent along the arm during school holidays and most summer evenings when the light is good, can visit fairly easily on foot or by bicycle from Tring and nearby villages. Being located near to Tring, from where many current users appear to stem, makes it an ideal choice when considering the Tring reservoirs, Aylesbury Arm and the Grand Union Canal main line as possible venues to fish. This fact would certainly appear to ensure demand in the future.

Following dredging work undertaken on the Wendover Arm several years ago aquatic-life has increasingly established itself. The intermittent flow of clean water along the arm resulting from the transference of water from the reservoirs to the summit level of the canal, and treated water discharge from New Mill sewage works, has provided conditions ideal for fish to flourish. The narrow water channel with an abundance of natural food contains a surprisingly large number of quality fish and provides for good sport all year round.



Perch are prevalent at Little Tring pumping station and near to the sewage outflow. Both spots are very popular with young anglers. Roach over 1 lb. are present and regularly known to move along the arm in shoals. Good Bream of more than 2lb. and carp to over 3 lb. originating from the main canal can also be located, though both species are not as extensive.



The attraction of canals for pleasure angling is not necessarily in seeking out very large fish that may be in residence - the "Specimen Hunter" will undoubtedly prefer to visit the Tring reservoirs, renowned throughout the country, - but the opportunity they provide for catching a large variety of fish species, however small these may be. The thrill for junior and novice anglers in landing even the smallest fish can be enormous.

The absence of locks along the Wendover Arm would provide a fairly uniform stretch of water, particularly attractive as a venue for organising competitive matches. The presence nearby of the Grand Union Canal main line and the Aylesbury Arm offers the very real potential for staging large regional angling competitions.

Current deficiencies, existing in the provision of facilities for visitors and natural conditions necessary for angling to thrive, would need to be rectified before the full angling benefits can be realised from the Wendover Arm. Excessive weed growth along the section currently navigable from the main line of the Grand Union Canal limits the number of anglers able to use the arm. This is particularly so during the summer months. The introduction of a higher level of boat traffic along the proposed lengthened navigable section would provide an efficient means of weed control and hence increase the angling capacity of the arm.

### 3.3 BOATING

Pleasure boating on the inland waterways of Britain has grown enormously from almost none in 1950 to some 23,000 boats licenced and registered for the 2000 miles of waterways managed by the British Waterways Board today. Of these over 1,600 are hire boats operating a 6-month season of mainly one and two week holidays. There are in addition another 1000 miles of independent waterways which are also widely used for boating.

From this can be gauged the large number of people who enjoy these waterways for leisure boating. A sizable benefit to the national economy is also achieved when the increasing number of overseas visitors taking English canal holidays is considered.

The main holiday area for the canal system is centred on the Midlands due to the wide choice of cruising routes. However the southern Grand Union canal supports 5 hire fleets between Berkhamsted and Leighton Buzzard, plus a popular trip boat business at Pitstone. There are also a substantial number of moorings for privately owned craft including a 100 plus boat marina at Cowroast on the Tring summit itself.

The 3 mile summit section provides the greatest length of lock free canal in the area, there being 10 locks to the south towards Berkhamsted and 18 locks northwards to Leighton Buzzard. The 6 mile canal arm to Aylesbury contains 16 locks.

Rewatering the Wendover Arm would add a further three miles of lock free navigation if opened to powered craft to the A41 road crossing at Bucklandwharf and another three and three quarter miles for canoes on the section to Wendover itself. Lock free boating for unpowered craft would therefore be possible for over nine miles, from Cowroast lock to the Wendover Town Basin.

The provision of such a substantial lock free length of navigable waterway passing through this picturesque and interesting countryside would attract many visiting boaters and the six miles available to powered craft would be especially valuable to elderly and infirm boat users.



Wendover is an attractive town with timbered cottages and many claims to history, including links with Oliver Cromwell and Robert Louis Stevenson. It has a Victorian building with a recently restored clock tower, once the town's lock-up, now a museum and tourist information office. Along the nearby Icknield Way is some of the most breathtaking scenery in Buckinghamshire and the town would undoubtedly provide a popular destination.



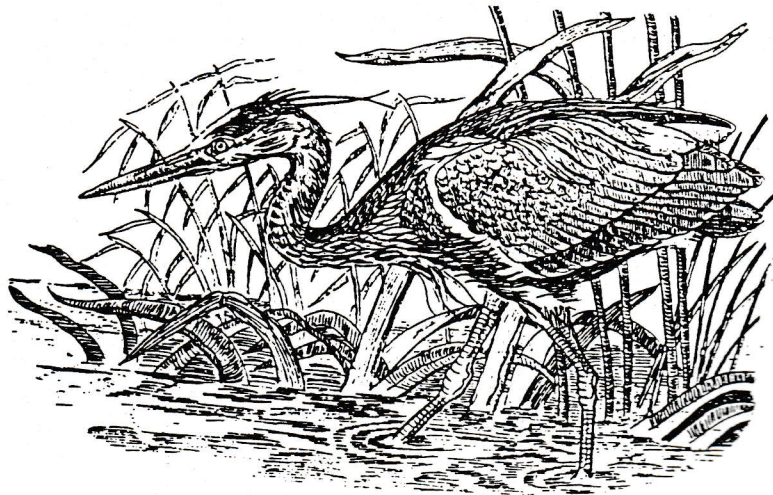
### 3.4 WILDLIFE AND NATURE CONSERVATION

The internationally famous Tring reservoirs (Startop's End, Marsworth, Tringford and Wilstone) were built during the early 19th Century to provide water for the increasing needs of the Grand Union Canal. In 1955 the administration of the surrounding banks, reed beds and woodland was taken over by the Nature Conservancy Council and Tring reservoirs became a National Nature Reserve.

The Tring end of the Wendover Arm runs adjacent to this nature reserve and rewatering the dry section of the canal would add to the attraction of the area for ornithologists, botanists, entomologists and hydrobiologists.

The reservoirs are beloved by bird watchers and are famous for black tern, crested grebe and many other waterfowl. Also frequently seen in the area are kingfishers, martins, swallows, swifts and yellow wagtails.

However, it is the wildfowl which visit the area that provided the main reason for the designation of the reservoirs as a National Nature Reserve. Four species of duck normally breed here and rarer species such as teal, widgeon, gadwall, goldeneye, and the goosander, with its spectacular plumage, visit in mid winter. Between the Marsworth and Startop's End reservoirs is a large heronry and the nearby reedbeds are home to a colony of reed warblers.



Waterside plant life includes watermint, meadowsweet, skullcap and gipsywort while on a larger scale a number of increasingly rare black poplar trees grow naturally.

Wildlife conservationists are very concerned that there should not be any interference with the Nature Reserve. Disused canals do not go away but do eventually attract land developments which are often out of sympathy with their surroundings.

Rewatering the Wendover Arm would enlarge the area available to wildlife, especially waterfowl, without adversely affecting the important wildlife habitats created by the reservoirs. Perhaps even more important, it would preserve and protect the landscape from alternative uses and the damaging effects these may bring.

In the experience of the Nature Conservancy Council the greatest problem faced by the reservoirs from the canal is excessive water consumption by the operation of locks. Since a restored Wendover Arm would be lock free this problem would not be increased.

Throughout some 2000 miles of inland waterways administered by the British Waterways Board it has been adequately demonstrated that the existence of powered boats at the levels normally found on navigable canals and rivers has no adverse effect on the presence of wildlife.

### 3.5 TOW PATH RELATED ACTIVITIES

Geographically the area is a long way from a coastal resort and it is therefore vital that local opportunities for outdoor recreation, especially water related recreation, are seized wherever possible. Just boat watching and strolling by a canal is popular with many families, as can be witnessed at Marsworth on any weekend.

A delightful linear park could be created along the canal corridor with the towpath providing a first class walking route with facilities for picnicking, photography, nature studies, local history and many other interests. Where space allows, separate tracks could be established which would be suitable for cycling and possibly pony trekking.

The New Inn, located at Bucklandwharf, is the only Public House on the Wendover Arm and has good access from where the towpath crosses the A41. Reflecting the increased interest being shown in canal restoration The Aylesbury Brewery Company has recently renovated and renamed it The Buckland Wharf.



The Basin Wendover



#### 4. DESIRABLE FEATURES FOR INCLUSION IN A RESTORED WENDOVER ARM

##### 4.1 LINEAR PARK

Throughout its length the Wendover Arm is of high visual amenity and provides a backcloth to many varied activities. The designation of the canal corridor as a linear park would assist the many interested bodies to adopt a co-ordinated scheme for the improvement of all aspects of the arm.

##### 4.2 TOWPATH

The towpath should as a minimum be made adequate for walking and wheelchairs etc. throughout its length. Provision for cycling and horse riding could be developed along parts of the arm, but subject to a suitable surface being laid which would not interfere with the pathway for walkers.

##### 4.3 NAVIGATION

The rewatering of the arm should allow unpowered craft to reach Wendover. Water of sufficient depth and width to be provided to allow the passage of a full length narrowboat to the A41 road bridge at Bucklandwharf with turning room and temporary moorings at that point.

##### 4.4 SLIPWAY

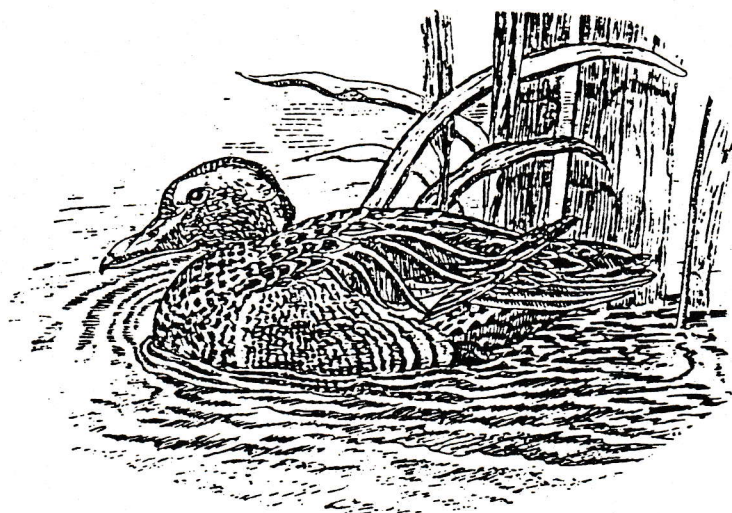
Facilities should be provided to enable small trailed boats to be launched safely. A suitable area to allow canoes to be floated conveniently from the bankside would benefit schools, youth groups and the general public as well as canoe clubs.

##### 4.5 CONSERVATION

The remaining original and 19th Century bridges and canal related structures should be preserved since they are very much part of the charm of the canal scene. Gamnel Bridge and the Tringford Pumping Station have recently become Grade II Listed structures.

##### 4.6 WILDLIFE

Care must be taken to ensure that nature conservation is encouraged along the total canal corridor. Signposted nature trails would assist public enjoyment of the area and provide an educational amenity for local schools.



#### 4.7 ANGLING

Bankside vegetation should be planted at various locations to provide holding points for fish. Small fish, e.g. gudgeon, to be introduced along the remaining shallow reaches of the arm.

#### 4.8 CAR PARKING

There should be careful siting of new car parking area(s), but not to cause either summer saturation or disturbance of the Nature Reserve.

#### 4.9 MARINA DEVELOPMENT

A restored arm would support various boat based businesses. These should be limited to at most two sites situated at either New Mill and/or Bucklandwharf.

### 5. TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### 5.1 GENERAL

Although this document is primarily concerned with the amenity benefits arising from the restoration of the Wendover Arm it is inevitable that technical and financial matters are taken into account. However it must be emphasised that a full feasibility study must be undertaken before any firm conclusions on these topics can be drawn.

#### 5.2 TECHNICAL

Throughout its history the arm has suffered considerable loss of water through the banks. The building of the stop-lock at Little Tring was just one of a number of attempts to stop this leakage of water and ultimately the water supply from the Wendover springs was culverted from a point east of Bucklandwharf to the Tringford Reservoir.



During 1986 the British Waterways Board has been undertaking a study of these now ageing culverts in order to assess the extent of repair or replacement that may be necessary in due course.

Rewatering of the dry section of the arm would obviate repair, replacement and continuing maintenance of the culverts and reduce the cost of pumping water from Tringford Reservoir. The use of modern materials will allow the leakage problems of the past to be avoided. Techniques to overcome leakage are well established and have been utilised in previous restorations such as the Kennet and Avon Canal.

In order to defer the cost of overcoming bank leakage along the section from Bucklandwharf to Wendover, arising from the raising of water level, this section could be maintained at its current lower level by damming the canal near to the A41 road bridge until such time further restoration be considered.

### 5.3 FINANCIAL

As the owners of the canal with certain statutory obligations relating to the maintenance of water supply throughout the canal system, the British Waterways Board are already financially involved with the operation of the Wendover Arm. They are enthusiastic supporters of the proposal to rewater the arm but canal restoration is expensive and they cannot be expected to finance such a scheme alone.

Both Aylesbury Vale District Council and Dacorum Borough Council are Community Programme Agents for the Manpower Services Commission Scheme. Both Councils have demonstrated their commitment to the development of the Wendover Arm as an important part of their planned leisure development and landscape improvement schemes, and can therefore be expected to co-operate with B.W.B in deploying M.S.C. effort at the arm.

Grant aid from a number of other sources would be available to cover specific features within an overall development programme. The Inland Waterways Association at national level, the Countryside Commission, the County Councils, the Tourist Board, are examples of organisations who could provide funding in this way.

In particular, the Department of the Environment has funds for the development and maintenance of areas designated as linear parks. They also administer Derelict Land Grants which can give local authorities up to 100% of the cost of schemes that give rise to recreational, commercial and sporting opportunities. The Wendover Arm restoration would provide all of these.

Voluntary fund raising for the Wendover Arm restoration campaign is already an established feature of the Hertfordshire Branch of the Inland Waterways Association. Other local groups, notably the Grand Union Canal Society and the Aylesbury Canal Society, are also deeply involved in fund raising activities for this project.

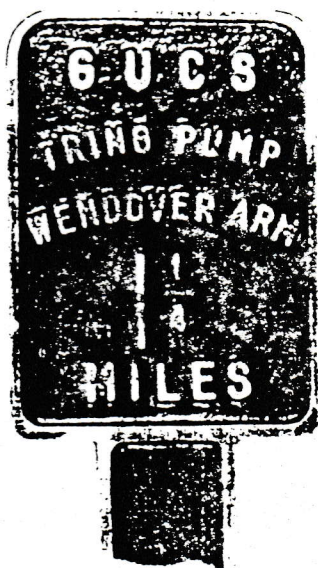
## 6. CONCLUSION

Disused canals become choked with weed growth and are ultimately useless for fishing. Dry canal beds become so densely overgrown that even wildlife stays away. This was the condition of the Wendover Arm in 1975 before a few far sighted enthusiasts embarked upon the clearance of the undergrowth. It was that beginning which has today made the entire length of the canal a delightful afternoon stroll.

There is a tremendous migration of people from the recession hit Midlands and North of England as people move to the South East for work. Green-field site development of small "high-tech" units are springing up everywhere. Consequently the pressure on the environment and the richness and quality of life in the Aylesbury Vale is becoming increasingly important.

The next step must therefore be to achieve the rewatering of the dry section to a standard that will permit navigation to the A41 road bridge at Bucklandwharf. The passage of boats will keep down weed growth, prevent the build-up of silt and help to maintain an abundant natural history.

The Wendover Arm Group have prepared this study of the amenity benefits arising from a restored Wendover Arm confident that those who read it will agree that this is an opportunity for all interests to benefit. The naturalist, the angler, the boater and those who enjoy a quiet stroll by the waterside will all share a common enjoyment of this superb waterway.



This souvenir is available to boaters reaching the current limit of navigation.

Help us turn this plaque into a piece of waterways history.

## POSTSCRIPT

The Wendover Arm Group would like to know your views and ideas regarding its aims for the Wendover Arm. In accordance with these aims, it will produce further discussion documents as the occasion demands and your views are therefore most important. Please write to the Wendover Arm Group, care of the author, at the address on page 20.



## AUTHORS ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank everybody who has helped me in the preparation of this document.

Many individuals and organisations have given helpful advice and direction, as well as contributing valuable information, and at the risk of offending those not mentioned specifically, I would like to thank the following:

The Tring Anglers who contributed the section on pages 11 and 12.

Steve Brabner of The Grand Union Canal Society and Barry Martin of the Hertfordshire Branch of the Inland Waterways Association for assistance with technical and historical matters.

Brian D. Pitman for the cover illustration and the line drawings of the Wendover Arm and other typical canal scenes on pages 1, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15 and 20.

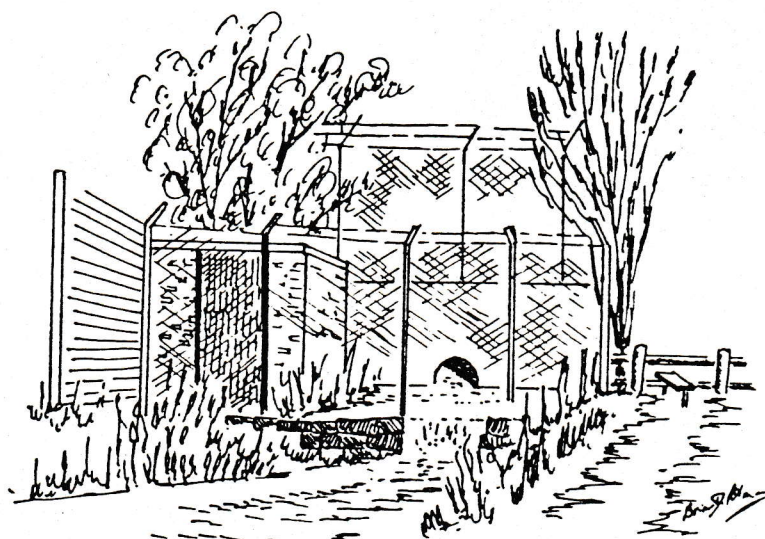
Dacorum Borough Council for drawing the maps on pages 2 and 6.

Bernard Banfield for painstakingly proof reading and correcting every draft.

My colleagues in the Wendover Arm Group for their generous advice and encouragement but for which this booklet would not have been finished yet.....

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--oo00oo--



Wendover - The Source



## APPENDIX A

### MEMBERS OF THE WENDOVER ARM GROUP COMMITTEE

Association of Pleasure Craft Operators (APCO)  
Aston Clinton Boat Club  
Aylesbury Canal Society  
Buckinghamshire County Council  
Chiltern Society (Water Resources Group)  
Cowroast Marina Ltd  
Dacorum Borough Council  
Dacorum Narrowboat Project  
Dunstable and District Boat Club  
Grand Union Canal Society  
Grebe Canal Cruises  
Inland Waterways Association (Buckinghamshire Branch)  
Inland Waterways Association (Hertfordshire Branch)  
Inland Waterways Association (Milton Keynes Branch)  
Kodak Cruising Club  
Lionhearts Cruising Club  
Wendover Parish Council

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## APPENDIX B

### OTHER ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTING WENDOVER ARM RESTORATION

Aylesbury Brewery Company Ltd  
Aylesbury Vale District Council  
Brian D. Pitman (Canal Artist)  
British Waterways Board  
Countryside Commission  
Farmers Wildlife Action Group  
Halton Parish Council  
Hertfordshire County Council  
Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council  
Narrowboat Trust Ltd  
Thames and Chiltern Tourist Board  
Thames Water Authority  
Tring Anglers  
Tring Ramblers