

THE WENDOVER ARM

of the Grand Union Canal

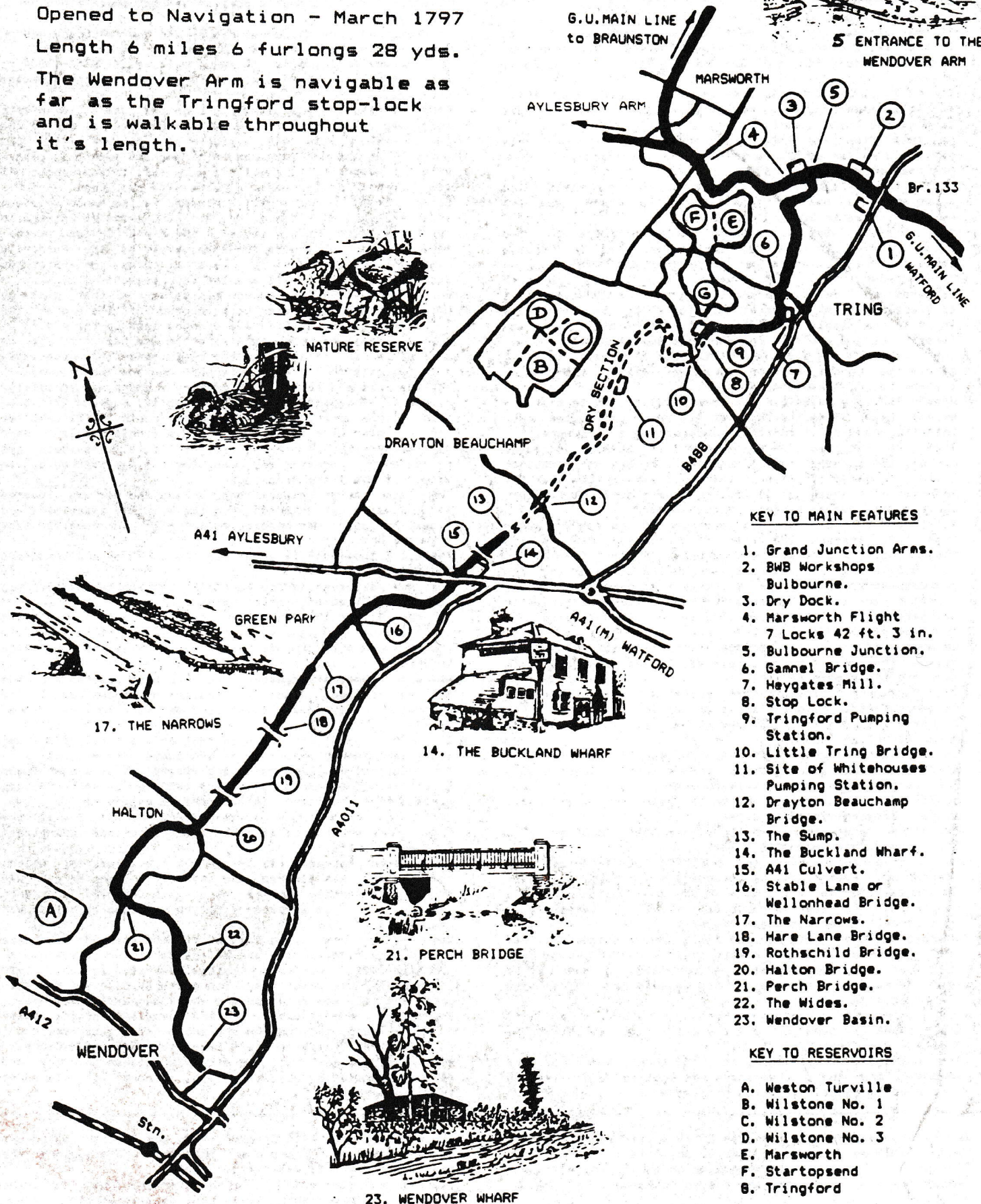
Opened to Navigation - March 1797

Length 6 miles 6 furlongs 28 yds.

The Wendover Arm is navigable as far as the Tringford stop-lock and is walkable throughout it's length.



5 ENTRANCE TO THE WENDOVER ARM



KEY TO MAIN FEATURES

1. Grand Junction Arms.
2. BWB Workshops Bulbourne.
3. Dry Dock.
4. Marsworth Flight 7 Locks 42 ft. 3 in.
5. Bulbourne Junction.
6. Gannell Bridge.
7. Heygates Mill.
8. Stop Lock.
9. Tringford Pumping Station.
10. Little Tring Bridge.
11. Site of Whitehouses Pumping Station.
12. Drayton Beauchamp Bridge.
13. The Sump.
14. The Buckland Wharf.
15. A41 Culvert.
16. Stable Lane or Wellonhead Bridge.
17. The Narrows.
18. Hare Lane Bridge.
19. Rothschild Bridge.
20. Halton Bridge.
21. Perch Bridge.
22. The Wides.
23. Wendover Basin.

KEY TO RESERVOIRS

- A. Weston Turville
- B. Wilstone No. 1
- C. Wilstone No. 2
- D. Wilstone No. 3
- E. Marsworth
- F. Startopsend
- G. Tringford

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE WENDOVER ARM.

With plans to build the 135 mile long Grand Junction Canal from the River Thames at Brentford to Birmingham it was essential to find a good supply of water to feed the summit level at Tring.

Work started in the summer of 1793 to divert the Well Head, which originally flowed via Thame to the River Thames, from Wendover along the 390 ft. contour line through the lands of Sir John Dashwood-King (4th Baronet) at Halton, to join the Tring summit level at Bulbourne.

It was decided that the feeder could be made navigable at little extra cost and on 28 March 1794 the Grand Junction Company's second Act, (34 Geo III cap 24), received Royal Assent.

In March 1797 the 6 mile 1348 yd. long branch canal, built to take wide boats, was opened to navigation at the same time as the Tring summit.

At this time the Main Line from Brentford was only navigable as far as Rickmansworth, and the Tring summit was not reached until early 1799.

Until the Aylesbury Arm was opened early in 1815, the Wendover Arm was the only navigable route from the Aylesbury area to London.

Many wharves were built along the Wendover Arm to send local produce to the London markets and also to receive coal, timber, and manure for use on the land.

In December 1799, John Westcar, who farmed the rich pastures of Creslow, transported an ox from Wendover Wharf to Blackfriars. At the first Smithfield fat stock show held in a livery stable at Dolphin Yard, Smithfield, the ox won first prize and was sold for enormous sum of £100.

John Westcar was a pioneer in the use of canals to send cattle to London markets instead of making them walk, thereby losing considerable weight.

Weston Turville reservoir was completed in 1799 so that any excess water from the Wendover Arm could be routed back into the Wendover stream thus compensating mill owners.

Trade on the Main Line across the Tring Summit increased rapidly and although the through route to Braunston was not fully completed for several years, it was obvious that the Wendover Arm would not be able to supply sufficient water, particularly during periods of dry weather.

Wilstone No. 1 reservoir was built in 1802 to collect water from local springs. The water was pumped into the Arm by a steam pumping engine at the Whitehouses Pumping Station.

By 1802 leakage was apparent through the banks of the Arm and despite temporary repairs the section between Bulbourne Junction and the Whitehouses Pumping Station was closed to navigation in the autumn of 1803 so that extensive repairs could be effected.

Because of commercial pressures the Arm was re-opened, without the repairs being completed, to meet the demand for water in the summer of 1804.

The Marsworth reservoir was built in 1806 beside the Marsworth Lock Flight collecting water from the Tring Drainage Feeder and was used to maintain levels on the Marsworth Flight pounds.

In 1810 a heading was driven from Marsworth reservoir to a small steam pump about 200 yds. from Bulbourne Junction.

The construction of the Aylesbury Arm signalled further needs for water and Wilstone No. 1 reservoir was enlarged, by bank raising, in 1811.

Tringford reservoir was built 1814 - 1816 together with Startopend reservoir 1815 - 1817.

As a stop-gap, during the building of Tringford and Startopend reservoirs, a temporary steam pumping engine was installed to lift water from the Weston Turville reservoir into the Wendover Arm. (This "temporary" arrangement lasted for about 25 years.)

Tringford Pumping Station was built in the second half of 1817, with a Boulton and Watt steam powered beam pump installed and operational by August 1818, to pump water from Marsworth, Tringford and Startopend reservoirs into the Wendover Arm.

With Tringford in operation, Marsworth reservoir fed into Startopend by overflow, and the small pump near Bulbourne Junction was dismantled in 1817.

The Aylesbury Arm, opening in 1815, took trade from the Wendover Arm and further trade was lost as water leakage continued to cause navigation problems.

Wilstone No. 1 reservoir was again enlarged in 1827 by further bank raising, and the Wilstone Nos. 2 and 3 were built in 1835 and 1839 respectively.

Following an inspection of the ageing pump at Whitehouses, it was decided to centralize all pumping efforts at Tringford.

A heading driven from Wilstone to Tringford was useable by November 1836, although a portion was not brick lined until January 1839.

In April 1841 the Whitehouses pump and the temporary Weston Turville pump were removed and sold.

In the years following the major closure of 1803 - 1804 it was clear that the repairs had not solved the leakage problems.

Other attempts were made through the years to effect localised repairs until the next major closure, during the period 1856 - 1858, when a significant portion of the bed and bank of the Arm was lined with asphalt and re-puddled. Although asphalt is a brittle material, it was about 15 years before further major repairs were required.

Baron Lionel de Rothschild purchased Halton Manor in about 1851, and in 1884 his son, Mr. Alfred Charles de Rothschild built the nearby Halton House in the French Chateau style. Many houses in the Halton area, built by the Rothchild family, bear monograms, coats of arms, or pictures depicting country crafts and the four seasons.

By 1894 - 1896 the leakage was so severe that a large proportion of the water being pumped into the Arm at the Tringford Pumping Station was flowing back up the Arm.

The alternatives for repairing the Arm had then to be considered in relation to the cost benefits, especially with competition from the Aylesbury Arm and the railways.

Towards the end of the 19th century the Arm was gradually closed to navigation beyond the Tringford Pumping Station. Stop planks were inserted during dry periods, followed by the building of a Stop Lock (with a single paddle), and as the Arm became increasingly difficult to navigate and consequently carrying declined, the Arm was blocked by an earth dam above the Stop Lock.

The water level between Wendover and the dam was lowered and the water was diverted into the Wilstone reservoirs and flowed through the heading to Tringford for pumping back into the Arm.

The G.J.C.C officially abandoned the canal beyond Tringford in 1904.

The Arm was never re-opened for navigation beyond the Stop Lock, despite strong local protests.

In May 1912 an 18 inch dia. culvert was laid under the bed of the canal from a sump at Drayton Beauchamp to Tringford where a separate pump was installed to raise the water back to the Arm.

At some time, after water level had been lowered and the Arm was closed, a concrete trough, now known as "The Narrows", was constructed at Green Park to seal local leaks.

In 1926 - 1927, the beam engines in the Tringford Pump House were removed and more modern pumps were fitted.

The building was lengthened and remodelled as a much lower structure. The sash windows were replaced by round headed windows from the Foxton Inclined Plane Engine House.

Two swing bridges have existed along the Arm, one at the Green Park Wharf and the other about 150 yards downstream from Whitehouses.

Much later the A41 road bridge was culverted, the Halton road bridge was lowered, and the Little Tring bridge was filled-in. Another bridge which had carried a branch railway line from Wendover into the RAF camp at Halton was demolished in 1964.

The Arm was constructed past William Meads Windmill, circa 1780, and the mill made use of the canal for carrying. The windmill was superseded by steam power and in about 1910 the windmill was demolished with a charge of black powder.

Later the mill was extended and was known as The New Mill. Downstream from the mill was the Bushell Brothers Boat-building Yard, many narrow and broad beam boats were built in this yard, including the "Progress" and the "Osprey". After Bushell's closed, the mill was further extended and is now operated by Heygates Mills, although all transport is by road.

We would welcome your comments on this information sheet, and would be pleased to receive any historical details including photos or post-cards which would increase our knowledge about the canal and the surrounding area.

The Wendover Arm Group was formed in October 1985 to co-ordinate the efforts of many individual bodies who had been striving for years to prevent any further deterioration of the infra-structure of the Wendover Arm.

At a meeting on 14th October 1987, the British Waterways Board agreed "in principle" that they would support the restoration of this delightful canal.

The way is now open. - The Wendover Arm Trust is being formed. - Anyone wishing to be sent details of the Wendover Arm Trust should contact the WAG Secretary.

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