



Basingstoke

Canal Heritage Footpath



INTRODUCTION

The Basingstoke Canal Heritage Footpath runs approximately 2 miles (3.2 km) from Festival Place, Basingstoke to Basing House, Old Basing. It closely follows the original route of the Basingstoke Canal. At Old Basing the footpath connects to other public footpaths, including a route through Crabtree Plantation and Black Dam Nature Reserve. Alternatively you can return along the Heritage Path

The footpath keeps to recognised rights of way but in places is currently inaccessible to prams, pushchairs and wheelchairs. Parts of the route may also be muddy at times. Please follow the Countryside Codes at all times

- **Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs**
- **Leave gates and property as you find them**
- **Protect plants and animals and take your litter home**
- **Keep dogs under control**
- **Consider other people**



Mr A J Harmsworth's last attempt to work a narrow boat through to Basingstoke



Entrance to Basingstoke Wharf from Wote Street (E.C. White Timber Yard) – supplied by Arthur Atwood

BASINGSTOKE CANAL

The Basingstoke Canal was completed in 1794 and connected Basingstoke to London via the River Wey and the River Thames. The 37 mile route includes a 1,230 yard tunnel at Greywell. The canal was built to provide a more economical means of transporting agricultural goods from Hampshire to London, and coal and fertilisers could be brought from London to Basingstoke.

Though some canals were financed by individual industrialists, it was more usual to form a joint-stock company. In the 18th century, a joint-stock company had to be authorised by Act of Parliament. In the case of canals, an Act was also necessary to obtain powers to purchase land and modify drainage. The Bill proceeded rapidly through Parliament and in 1778 the Basingstoke Canal Act was passed.

It was ten years before work could begin, because the financial crisis during the American War of Independence delayed raising capital. William Jessop was appointed Surveyor and consultant engineer, and the contract was awarded to John Pinkerton, who let out the work to subcontractors. However the canal was not opened to Basingstoke, until 1794, because the company ran out of funds and had to obtain a second Act of Parliament to authorise raising more capital. The canal took six years to complete and cost £154,463.

Once opened, the canal was dogged by further financial problems and water shortages, particularly in the section from Greywell to Basingstoke. Improved roads and construction of the London and South Western Railway in the 1830s contributed to a further loss in trade. The last cargoes to and from Basingstoke were carried in August 1900.

The canal west of Greywell was threatened by complete abandonment, so Mr A J Harmsworth carried a 10 ton load of sand as a token cargo to maintain the right of navigation in the winter of 1913-14. His narrow boat, 'Basingstoke' only managed to reach Basing Wharf after a three month journey because of the difficulty in raising a sufficient water level beyond the Greywell Tunnel. In 1932, a second collapse of the Greywell Tunnel resulted in the last five miles of the canal becoming inaccessible. The Basingstoke Wharf was finally sold off in 1936 and a bus station replaced the timber yard and cattle market.

BASINGSTOKE CANAL WHARF

Opened in 2002, Festival Place covers land once occupied by the wharf of the Basingstoke Canal. The wharf and canal basin were the loading point for the agricultural produce of central Hampshire - grain, hops, timber, wool, woollen textiles and paper products. From Festival Place, walk towards the amphitheatre and under the road to Eastrop Link. On the wall of the underpass is artwork designed by Bettina Furnée, consisting of six painted steel panels. They are backlit and inscribed with a poem by the poet Neil Rollinson.

In summer Eastrop Link is a pleasant spot to stop and watch the fountains and passers by, but more significantly, **this is where the Basingstoke Canal Heritage Footpath starts**, and the canal is commemorated with a plaque on the wall of the southward emerging underpass. There are also representations of Basingstoke Canal Tokens.

THE BASINGSTOKE CANAL TOKEN

Tokens were paid to navvies when coin was in short supply during the Napoleonic wars. The Basingstoke Canal Token is believed to have been designed by Wyon, engraver to the Mint. It shows a spade and mattock in a wheelbarrow on one side, and a man and a tree-trunk in a sailing barge on the reverse. It was chargeable at a number of public houses in the area, including the 'George' at Odiham. An unusual feature of this token is that it was worth one shilling. Most comparable tokens of the period were worth a halfpenny.



*photo card of canal at Eastrop
- supplied by Arthur Attwood*



*Plan of canal basin 1894 –
supplied by P Vine
copyright P A L Vine*



*The plaque and tokens at
Eastrop Link*



photo card of canal at Eastrop
- supplied by Arthur Attwood

Look out for scented
Meadowsweet and kingfishers
on your walk

EASTROP PARK

The footpath route runs east through Eastrop Park marked by arrow disks. The park was laid out during the New Town Development in the late 1960s.

The River Loddon runs through the park, providing a home for sticklebacks, newts, frogs and toads. The wet area at the eastern end of the park acts as a balancing pond, to regulate water flow in heavy downpours. It also provides a habitat for spring flowers, such as lady's smock and celandine. Many birds can be seen in the park, including kingfishers and grey wagtails.

The canal boundary hedge, mainly hawthorn, runs along the southern edge of the park, with crocus and daffodils naturalised beneath.

Through the subway, at the east end of the park, walk a little way along the cycleway before turning right onto Basing Fen.

This section of the footpath runs along the bed of the canal. The boundary hedges and banks can be seen on both sides.



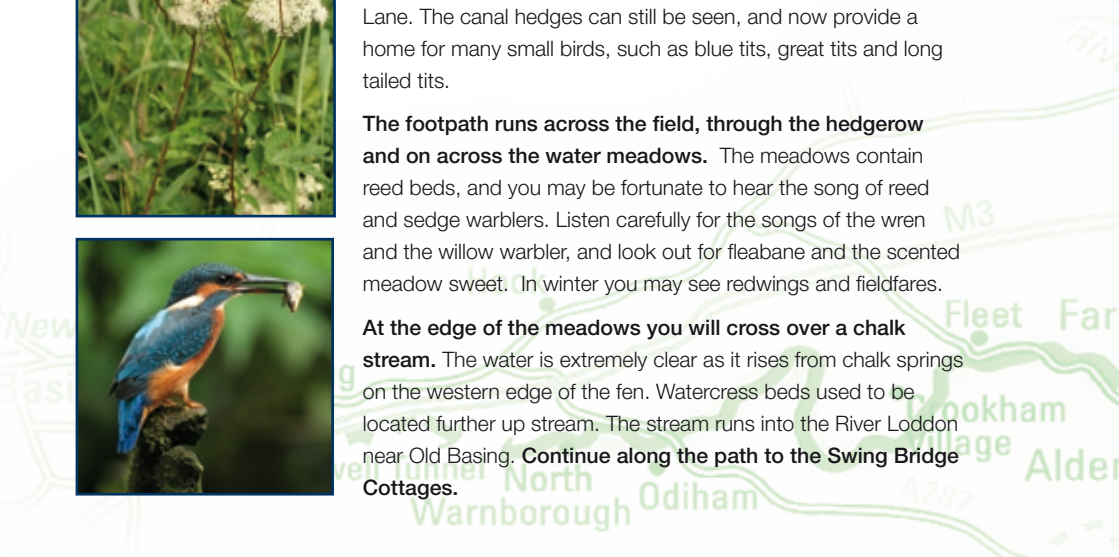
BASING FEN

At this point the canal was built across Basing Fen (or Basing Water Meadows), which is a peat moor. The canal used to run in a large loop around the Fen until it ran parallel with Redbridge Lane. The canal hedges can still be seen, and now provide a home for many small birds, such as blue tits, great tits and long tailed tits.

The footpath runs across the field, through the hedgerow and on across the water meadows. The meadows contain reed beds, and you may be fortunate to hear the song of reed and sedge warblers. Listen carefully for the songs of the wren and the willow warbler, and look out for fleabane and the scented meadow sweet. In winter you may see redwings and fieldfares.



At the edge of the meadows you will cross over a chalk stream. The water is extremely clear as it rises from chalk springs on the western edge of the fen. Watercress beds used to be located further up stream. The stream runs into the River Loddon near Old Basing. **Continue along the path to the Swing Bridge Cottages.**



SWING BRIDGE COTTAGES

Swing Bridge Cottages were built in the 1840s and are still inhabited. The swing bridge was replaced by a fixed wooden bridge around 1910, but this collapsed and the canal bed was filled in during the 1950s. The route of the old canal runs eastwards along Redbridge Lane to Red Bridge.

The footpath route runs left along Redbridge Lane, then right into Basing Limepits car park, and immediately left onto Basingstoke Common. Once on the common, the path follows the perimeter fence and hedge line to Red Bridge, where you will find a Basingstoke Canal Heritage Footpath interpretation board.

The Limepits contain a large play area and informal space for picnics and relaxation.



photo card of Swing Bridge Cottages circa 1912 - supplied by Arthur Attwood

BASINGSTOKE COMMON

The common was provided to replace the original Common in London Road, which was incorporated into War Memorial Park as part of the new town development. In summer the land is often grazed by cattle, therefore it is recommended that dogs be kept on leads.

Look out for the layered thorn hedges, magpies and rabbits on the Common. From its highest point look back towards Basingstoke to appreciate the distinctive skyline of Festival Place, Basing View and the AA building.



RED BRIDGE

Redbridge Lane crosses the canal here. The bridge is now the only canal structure still visible west of Basing House Bridge, which stands at the entrance to Basing House. Local red brickwork was used and the design was typical of the 18th century, with stone capped piers, bands, cambered arches and parapets.

Continue on the common and walk up the hill to the rear of Basing House. Follow the hedgerow on your left, exiting the common beside the British Legion on Crown Lane.

Turn left towards Old Basing village and at The Crown. Continue along the street until you reach the main entrance of Basing House.



The great wall of Basing House with two of its octagonal dovecotes built, c.1530.

*supplied by P. Vine
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COVER PICTURE CREDITS

Front Cover Images: (left to right) Picture of Basingstoke Warfe, Wote Street, painted by Terry Harrison for 'London's Lost Route to Basingstoke - the story of the Basingstoke Canal' 1994 edition is published by Sutton Publishing and written by P A L Vine; Canal Art; photo card of Swing Bridge Cottages circa 1912 - supplied by Arthur Attwood

Back Cover Images: (left to right) photo card of canal at Eastrop - supplied by Arthur Attwood; Canal Art; Bridge at Basing House 1912. Originally supplied by Arthur Attwood

BASING HOUSE

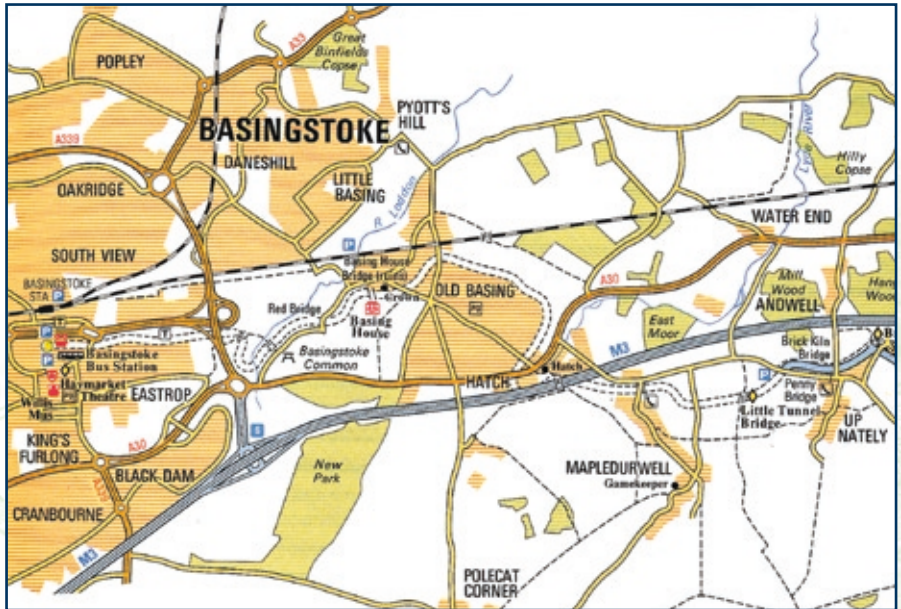
Basing House was the largest private house in England, before being razed to the ground by Oliver Cromwell in 1646. During construction a stash of gold guineas was found, believed to be part of the treasure worth £3million, buried by the defending cavaliers.

The earthworks and ruins of Basing House are open to the public from April to September and admission fees will apply. Further information is available from

www.hampshireculture.org.uk/basing-house



*Bridge at Basing House 1912.
Originally supplied by
Arthur Atwood*





Society Websites

The Basingstoke Heritage Society www.bas-herit-soc.org/

Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society www.basingstoke-canal.org.uk