

## RESTORATION

MARTIN LUDGATE SPENDS A WEEK LAYING  
BRICKS AT WOOLSTHORPE LOCKS



# GO-AHEAD GRANTHAM

After a tricky start, it's now full speed ahead for the Lottery-funded scheme to rebuild locks at Woolsthorpe – but the Grantham Canal Society is already looking ahead towards starting new projects elsewhere on the canal...

**T**his was where things started to go not quite to plan” was how I described the situation developing at Woolsthorpe Locks on the eastern end of the Grantham Canal in Lincolnshire in a restoration article in 2015, the last time I’d laid a few bricks there as a volunteer on a Waterway Recovery Group canal camp.

Fast forward to early July 2019 and you’d have found me bricklaying again on another WRG volunteer camp at the same site on Woolsthorpe Locks, at the end of a four-mile restored length reaching westwards from the A1 main road crossing on the edge of Grantham. But you might also think that everything looked like it was going very much to plan. The

dismantled lock chamber was scaffolded-out very professionally; experienced volunteer brickies were guiding newer recruits as the main lock walls gradually took shape; another team was making a good job of tackling the three-dimensional jigsaw of rebuilding the lock’s upper wing walls, curving and sloping in various directions simultaneously.



Camp leader Emma checks the levels for the brickwork



And this is where most of my WRG team were working.

We were there for the first of three consecutive weeks of Canal Camps; a team of 20 volunteers of various ages and levels of experience: from Jack, a young first-timer attending the camp as part of his Duke of Edinburgh Award, to John, retired for some years and a WRG volunteer since the 1970s. Mother and daughter Celine and Anna, recruited through WRG's links with international volunteering organisation REMPART, gave us some interesting times translating technical terms between English and French; our leader was Emma, a qualified civil engineering project manager

still in her 20s but with several summers of leading WRG Canal Camps already under her belt.

Our main task was to continue reinstating the walls of Lock 14, which are being built as a relatively thin ("nine-inch" in old money) brick wall backed by concrete, as a series of approximately 0.6m rises. Some indication of what I meant by swift progress was that already this had reached the third such rise, thanks to some improvements to the working methods in the light of experience from Lock 15. By the end of the week the WRG and various GCS volunteers (they have dedicated teams working every day of the week) had between them completed this section of the brickwork, with a concrete pour scheduled for the following week, followed by more bricklaying on the third week, followed by another concrete pour... in fact it's been making such rapid progress that a WRG camp scheduled for later in the summer has been moved down to the Cotswold Canals, as there wasn't likely to be sufficient work by then!

As well as the main site, we also did some finishing-off jobs at Lock 15 – towpath fence, landscaping and pointing-up the mortar joints of the coping stones (from a boat – the lock's already in water). This gave the new volunteers a chance to see what a restored lock looked like – and to see the Society's trip-boat passing through one of the three locks (16 to 18) restored some years ago. And I believe we all went home enthused about how well things are progressing on the Grantham.



Yes, it was all going to plan – but to a rather different plan from the one originally envisaged when a National Lottery Heritage Fund supported package enabled Grantham Canal Society (supported by WRG volunteers and Canal & River Trust support staff) to begin restoring locks 14 and 15. As is often the case, it wasn't until the dismantling phase was under way at Lock 15 that it was realised that the chamber wall had distorted so badly that instead of a repair it would be a complete dismantling and rebuilding job. "A massive learning curve for CRT and GCS" is how the Canal Society's Chief Executive David Lyneham-Brown describes it. But learn they did, and if the work on Lock 15 took rather longer than expected as a result, the opposite is true of Lock 14, which is where the main emphasis has moved to for 2019 following the completion of the main work at Lock 15 last year, and where (despite once again having to take the walls right down and rebuild them) progress has been swift.







A three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle: rebuilding the upper wing walls



Shuttering set up ready for the next concrete pour



"One we made earlier" - Lock 16 with trip-boat





But what next for GCS? Carry straight on and restore locks 12 and 13, completing the flight? Ideally, yes, but unfortunately despite the accelerating progress, the sheer amount of unexpected work on 14 and 15 has severely depleted the Lottery funding, which had been expected to at least fund a start on the lower two locks. It would be tragic if GCS's huge resource of trained volunteers – “an amazing bunch” in David's words – were to be disbanded through lack of work, but the Society's own resources can't support keeping up the same level of work.

However there is a way forward: GCS plans to begin work on initial low-cost jobs, such as building a lock overflow bywash and a temporary dam to allow the

chambers to be drained, then investigation of their condition (believed to be much less serious than 14 or 15) – in addition to other work such as a slipway further up the flight. Meanwhile, approaches to NHLF will aim to put the case for more cash on the grounds that these two locks represent the ‘heritage restoration’ job that 14 and 15 turned out not to be.

If that can be achieved, and these locks restored in the forthcoming years, then there is only one very minor missing road bridge to be dealt with between there and Redmile village. Opening the canal to Redmile would create a 10-mile restored length reaching through from the outskirts of Grantham, with the A1 crossing at one end – and a pub at the other!

But at the same time, David and the Society are already looking at other sites elsewhere on the canal's 33-mile route from Grantham to the Trent – and in particular to the far end of the canal, closer to where it met the Trent in Nottingham. Sadly (and as Sod's Law dictates happens all too often on canal restorations!) the most serious blockage on the entire canal is just a few yards where it would connect to rest of the waterways network. There's no real prospect of reopening the link to the river on its original route, because a length of canal here was obliterated by a 1970s road scheme. However, David believes that it

would be an important step towards eventually getting this blockage bypassed if a nearby length in Nottinghamshire could be restored, thereby showing the authorities at this end of the canal that the Society means business.

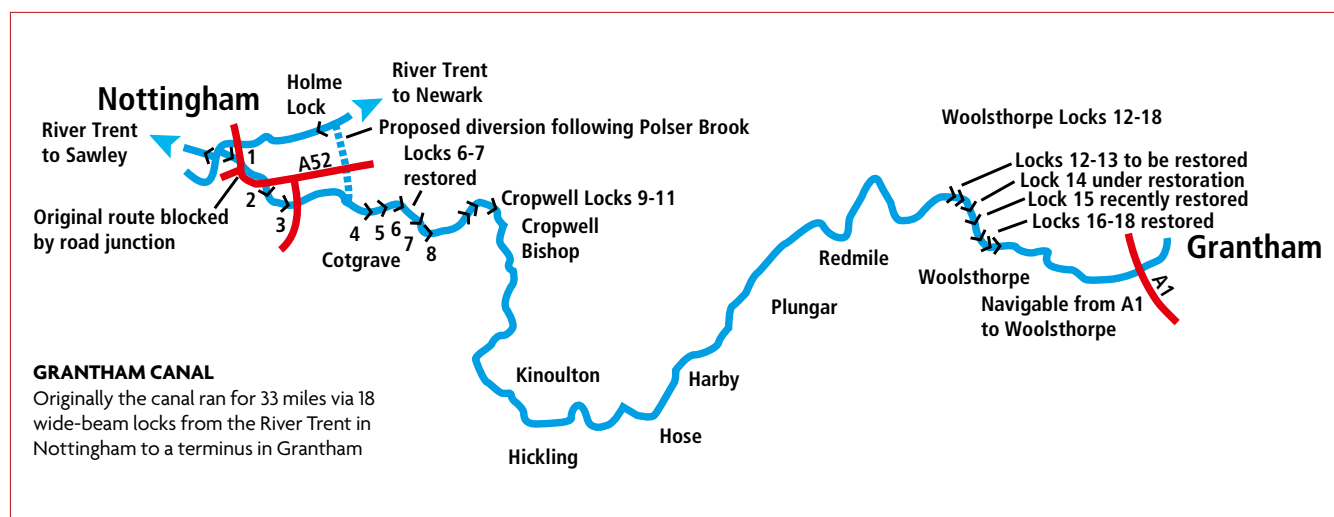
The length proposed for restoration is the ‘Cropwell Dry Section’, running from the near Cotgrave, just outside Nottingham, through Cropwell Bishop to near Kinoulton – a distance of almost five miles. Although referred to as ‘dry’, in fact parts of it are in water, and the aim is to re-water the rest of it in stages from west to east, lining the channel where necessary. There are also four locks to restore (three in a flight at Cropwell), a couple of failed culverts to rebuild, some major tree and vegetation clearance needed, and some bridge reinstatements including a couple of places where original bridges are believed to survive buried – which could be interesting. It's not going to be a quick job (David's talking about a decade, plus or minus a couple of years) but if it can be linked up with lengths already restored on either side – a section at Cotgrave which benefited from former colliery reclamation, and a length restored through Hickling in the 1990s with support from the former British Waterways – it could result in a ten-mile navigable length in Nottinghamshire to match the one in Lincolnshire.

Between these, there's a third county that the canal passes through:



Lock on the Cotgrave length, restored as part of colliery reclamation work





The Grantham end, east of the A1, could be the centre of a "Grantham Waterfront" regeneration

Leicestershire. Although there will be significant work to be done to restore this ten-mile length, David "isn't worrying" about it – there are no 'show stoppers', no locks to restore (it's near the middle of the 20-mile 'long pound', quite impressive for an area that's not exactly flat), some bridges survive, and one road bridge has been reinstated with a flat deck designed to be converted into a liftbridge when needed.

While not forgetting this length, GCS is also looking to the trickier sections at the ends of the canal. We've already mentioned the Trent link: a possible alternative route bypassing Nottingham has been identified, running close to the

route of the Polser Brook and meeting the river downstream of Holme Lock. Local attitudes to its creation are "generally favourable", although chances to progress it a few years ago as part of a proposed development scheme fell foul of the economic downturn. Today, progress here is seen as riding on the back of a successful restoration of the Cropwell Bishop length.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Society is also looking eastwards, to the Grantham end of the canal. Rather than stop at the A1, where the current restored length ends, would it be possible to go back in to the town's original terminal basin? Crossing the dual carriageway A1 wouldn't be

cheap, but it would turn a canal ending on the outskirts of Grantham, with no real value to the town, into a "Grantham Waterfront" urban regeneration project which might "double the value of Grantham". In fact, starting the regeneration scheme now might help pay for the A1 crossing later.

Finally, a couple of hundred years ago there was a scheme to link the Grantham Canal to the Sleaford Navigation, another dead end which when restored will link to the Witham. And a couple of decades ago, in the heady years around the Millennium, somebody suggested reviving the idea. Might it be a goer? David laughs and says "We'll restore the canal first!" ☺

Next for restoration: the Cropwell dry section

