

Portsmouth and Arun Canal

The 18th Century rise of the Industrial Revolution saw the development of a system of canals throughout the country enabling heavy, bulky loads to be transported with ease. They became even more important during the Napoleonic Wars because inland routes were much safer than the exposed waters of the English Channel. A route linking London with Portsmouth was of vital importance and the link from Arundel to Chichester was the final section to be built.

An important condition of the Act of Parliament allowing construction of the canal was that vessels had to "consume their own smoke". No steam was to be blown into the atmosphere but had to be passed through condensers.

Sales Pitch of 1823

"The canal forms a short means of conveyance by water from the Metropolis to the British Channel, whereby the tedious and often dangerous passage through the Downs can be avoided enabling the Merchant to forward his goods from London to either of the ports westward of Arundel with nearly as much despatch as usually attends the common roads wagons incurring in no case so much as one third of the expense (sic) and in several cases not even one sixth.

The seal of the Portsmouth and Arundel Navigation company

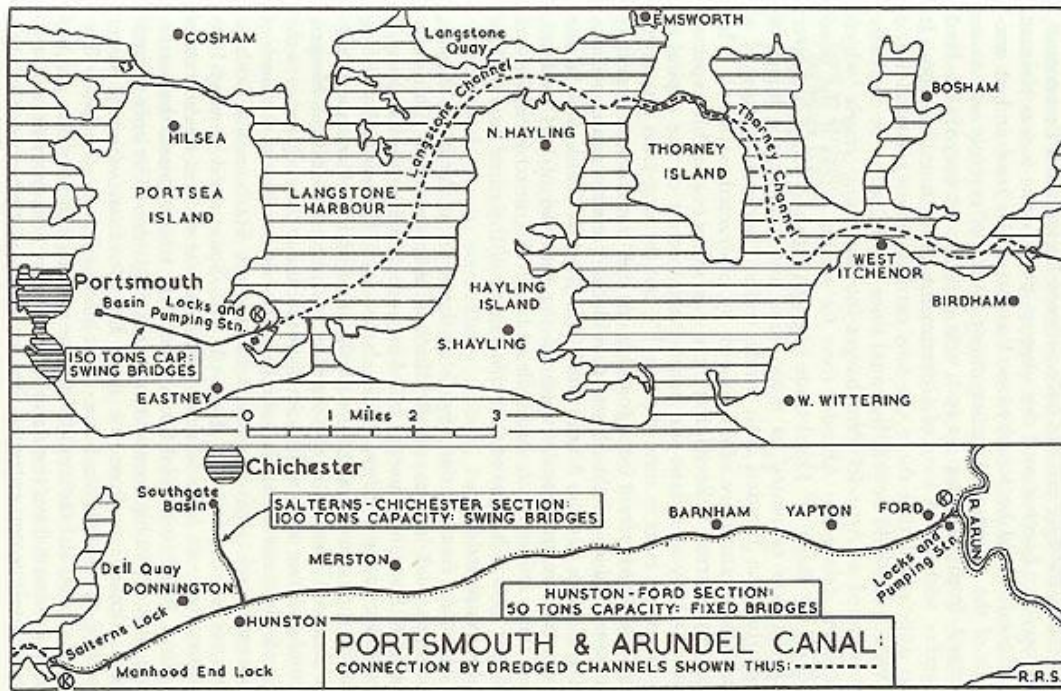


The canal was built in 1823 and ran from river Arun at Ford to Chichester (Hunston) then onto Portsea Island and Portsmouth. It was never a financial success and was abandoned in 1855; the company was wound up in 1888.

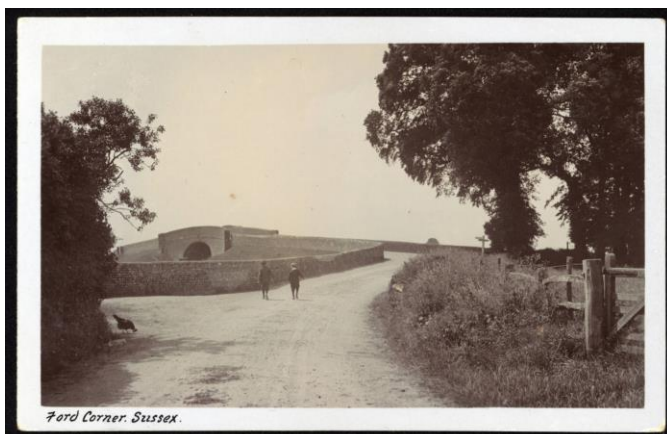
Coal, iron, building materials and grain were transported along the canal route but perhaps the most interesting cargo of all was gold bullion. Every month until 1826, precious cargoes of bullion left Portsmouth for the Bank of England. 25-30 tonnes was the usual consignment but one day the Union and Portsea went through together with 72 tonnes on board. Armed guards stayed on board at all times.

The canal started in Ford. An enormous pump was constructed to lift water from the River Arun into the canal. It was contained in a building the size of a four-storey house. It had a brick-built factory style chimney in order to build up the necessary head of steam to lift 5,000 gallons of water per minute. Only fresh water could be used so pumping could only take place for an hour either side of low tide.

Map of the route of the canal



Idealized view of the engine house and lock at Ford. (date unknown)



Bridge over the canal Ford. This canal bridge – brick arched and reputedly the last bridge to be regularly used by traffic. It was demolished in the 1950's. There are 2 young boys walking towards the flint wall.



The remains of the canal in Ford. The bridges have long gone having been swept away in the floods of the 1950's. In the distance is Lock Cottage. This was a pair of semis built for Lock keepers in 1820. The canal bed is over grown.

Ford Canal Bridge. There were 25 bridges across the canal, 4 in Ford.



The canal bed can be seen from Ford where it ran alongside the church through Ford airfield and then into Yapton Emerald Gardens. The remains of a bridge and the old tow path are still visible. It then crosses Burndell Road into Canal Road. At the end of the Pines is Tacklee Bridge. This was restored when the small housing estate was built by the developer. The canal then crossed Drove Lane and then into Barnham. The Bridge near Barnham church in the grounds of Barnham Court Farm was lovingly restored by volunteers with funding from the Sussex Archaeological Trust

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Tacklee Bridge at the Pines
Yapton

Costing £170,000 the canal was opened in 1822 with much pomp and ceremony. 304 people had invested in the Arundel to Portsmouth Canal including such notables as the Duke of Norfolk, Earl of Egremont, but the timing was bad as early as 1825 plans for a Surrey and Hampshire Railway were published and with the coming of the railways, the canal went into repaid decline. By 1840, through traffic from London had ceased and no dividends were ever paid by the company to its investors.



Owned by West Sussex County Council, much of the route from Birdham to Chichester has been restored in conjunction with Chichester Ship Canal Trust. The whole length provides interesting walking, where a rich variety of wildlife can be seen. The canal flows into Chichester Harbour which is managed by Chichester Harbour Conservancy.

Today moves are afoot to restore Burndell Bridge. It is tucked away in a corner of Emerald Gardens Yapton completely overgrown.

acknowledgements: Yapton and Ford Local History group. Chichester Canal Trust