

U3A Bikers Along the Thames to Osterley Park Friday 14th April 2023

This route out to Osterley Park was developed by Peter soon after the Group was formed, and remains one of the Group's most popular destinations. For some of today's riders it was their first visit to this park.

Eight riders assembled on the bridge at Clapham Junction Station before descending to the platform to board the Southwestern train for the journey out to Mortlake.

Here we were intercepted by one of the platform staff who demanded to know "how many of you are there?" Then "there's only room on the train for four of you". Fortunately when the train arrived and the train guard was consulted, she was happy to wave everyone aboard the almost-empty train.

At Mortlake Station we made use of the large area of cycle racks to park up and then head for the *Metos* café for coffee, cinnamon buns (for some) and conversation. Directly opposite the café is modest brick building (now the office of a classic car showroom) that was built for Queen Victoria as a private waiting room.



We were very happy to extend the coffee break a little to allow time for one member to join us, a missed connection having delayed the journey.

The Thames Path is close by: after crossing the level crossing, Mortlake Green and the Lower Richmond Road, Ship Lane led on to the path.

After a brief stop under Chiswick Bridge to don rain trousers, the route was upstream around the sweep of the river about two miles to Kew Bridge, now with a shared cycle path. An improved crossing on lights led to Kew Bridge Road and on to Brentford High Street, not too busy.



At the bridge over the River Brent we turned right on to the river path alongside the Grand Union Canal. The Brentford Lock, where the river enters the Thames, lies down-river in the other direction.

The first lock, Lock 100, is the Brentford Gauging Lock where boats were measured (by their depth in the water) for the weight of cargo they were carrying and the appropriate fee was charged for use of the canal.



On an easily-negotiated bridge the path changed to the opposite bank and we made steady progress along the canal as it snaked its way west, passing under the Great West Road (the A4), and then the M4. Some care was needed because of uneven parts of the path due to tree routes and poor maintenance.

Shortly afterwards, we arrived at the bottom of the **Hanwell Lock flight**. This set of six locks, starting at Lock 95, carries the canal over a rise of 50 feet. A pair of swans on the opposite bank were busy with nest-building.



There is a bricked-up portion of the wall which used to give access to Asylum Lock, for the transfer of goods in and food produce out of the asylum. This is the view looking back down the flight.

The towpath continued on to Lock 90, the top lock on this flight. This stretch of the Grand Union Canal was opened in 1794 and was the first section of what was then called the Grand Junction Canal.



Leaving the top lock we soon arrived at **Three Bridges**, and paused to look at this unique feature,

At this point, Windmill Lane crosses the canal which in turn crosses a railway line. It was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel to allow the Great Western Railway branch from the mainline to Brentford Dock to pass below the canal and a road.



We left the canal at this point and our route was along Windmill Lane, a B road with fairly light traffic and a 20 mph speed limit ; this was fortunate as there was no cycle path along this road for the mile or so to the mini-roundabout which signed us to Osterley Park.

Continuing on along Windmill Lane we came to the entrance to the Georgian country estate at Osterley Park and **Osterley House**.

This is a Tudor house built in the 1570s by Sir Thomas Gresham.



Time did not all allow for a visit to the House, a National Trust property but in the former stables there was an excellent café which served us well for our lunch stop.

It being too cold to sit outside, we found room in for lunch sitting in a stall in the converted stable block.

From Osterley Park we made our way on quiet suburban roads to Syon Lane Station, which has level access to the platform, for the return train journey to Clapham Junction. Several of us explored the alternative of Vauxhall Station from where there is a quiet route back across Brixton Road and back to Loughborough Junction.

This was an easy-going ride, enjoyed by all.

Notes

The Hanwell Lock flight is a series of six locks which raises the canal by 53ft in a third of a mile, a trip that can take boats over an hour to make. The six locks were built in 1794 to take the Grand Union down to the Thames along the “canalised” River Brent.

The flight of locks, now a Scheduled Ancient Monument, was featured in a painting by JMW Turner, who in 1810 painted the canal at Hanwell, with a lock in the foreground and windmill behind, a surprisingly rural look for such an industrial area.

Five side ponds can be found alongside the flight on the south side of the navigation. Built in 1815, these were used to store water to re-fill the locks in busy times. Look out for a ramp for recovering horses that fell into the canal.

Ealing Hospital was originally the (1st) Middlesex County Asylum, better known as Hanwell Asylum, which opened on 16 May 1831. The site is now home to the West London Mental Health NHS Trust: behind the high walls are high barbed wire topped fences. The pale filled-in arch was once the entrance to a dock in the asylum. Asylum Dock was used to bring in goods for the hospital, such as coal, and to transport out excess home-grown produce from the hospital.

Lock 90 to 93

This stretch of the Grand Union Canal passes through Norwood and Hanwell Locks from the River Thames at Brentford Locks and was opened in 1794. This was the first section of what was originally called the Grand Junction Canal. Its purpose was to provide a new, shorter and quicker transport route between London and Birmingham by connecting with a network of canals at Braunston, near Daventry in the Midlands. When the canal reached Braunston in 1805 it cut 60 miles of the shortest alternative route which had been via Oxford.

William Jessop, the canal Chief Engineer, had foreseen the bottlenecks when boats queued to pass through busy locks. Here on the Grand Junction Canal he built locks wider enough to take two narrowboats at the same time.

Three Bridges At this point, a road crosses the canal which in turn crosses the railway. It was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel for the Great Western Railway branch from their mainline to Brentford Dock. It was completed in 1859 and was perhaps Brunel's last major undertaking. It is a rare surviving example; most of the cast iron structures he designed have been replaced. See also:

http://www.disused-stations.org.uk/features/windmill_lane_bridge/

Osterley House. This impressive neo-classical mansion was originally a Tudor house built in the 1570s by Sir Thomas Gresham. It was acquired by wealthy banker Sir Francis Child in 1713, a perfect symbol of his status and prosperity. His grandson, also called Francis, engaged Robert Adam in 1761 to remodel and transform Osterley into the ‘palace of palaces’, a lavish party palace for entertaining the Childs’ family, friends and clients.

Riders: Andrew, Denise & John, Jan, Jane, John, Julia, Martin, Niesje

Ride leaders: Denise & John

Report by John Clements

16th April 2023