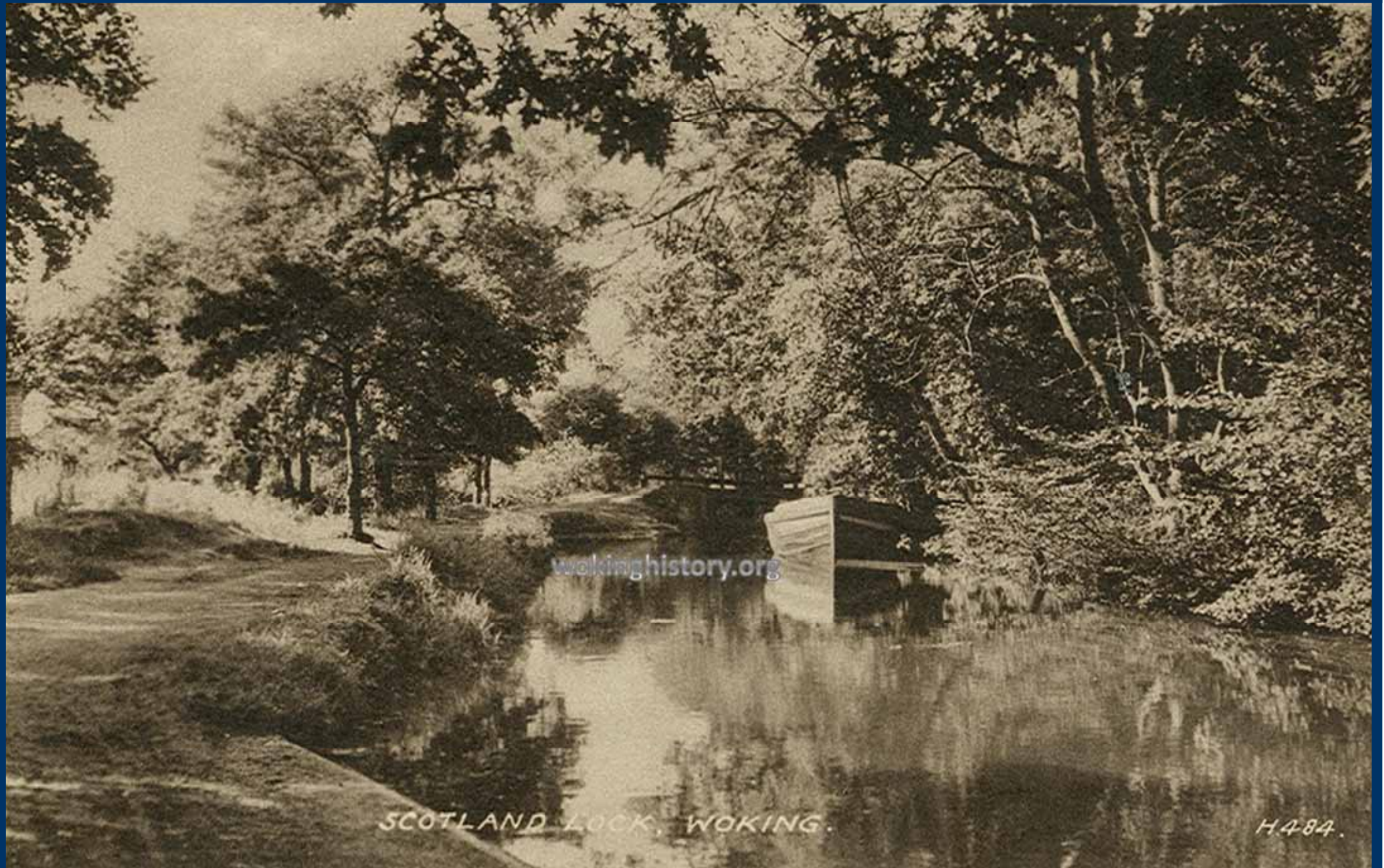


LAST LOAD OF TIMBER & THE SALE OF THE BASINGSTOKE CANAL

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The Basingstoke Canal had never been a proper commercial success. The Act of Parliament allowing its construction had been passed in 1778, but because of the American War of Independence it was not until 1788 that work started on construction and 1794 before it was complete. In 1787 it was estimated that 30,700 tons of goods would be carried per annum, bringing in £7,783.8s.4d in tolls, but in its entire history that amount of tonnage was only met on three occasions – once in the 1830's when the canal was being used to carry goods to build what would become its main rival, the London & South Western Railway, and then for a couple of years in the mid 1930's when it was last used to carry coal to the gas works at Woking.

By then it was clear that the canal was in decline with many of the locks above the Woking pound in a state of disrepair. Lock Seven at Goldsworth was probably as far as anyone could go, and in reality few barges ventured beyond the timber yard at Arthurs Bridge.

The canal had been in financial trouble before. In 1825 there was only one trader on the canal

and in 1869 the original company was wound up. The waterway was sold in 1874 for £12,000, but within four years it was in liquidation again. Probably the lowest point in its history was when it was used by Horatio

Bottomley in his fraud in the early 20th century, with Woking Council was having problems repairing the bridges and trying to get the canal owner to pay for their rebuilding. In 1923 there was a mini revival with the purchase by A J

The Basingstoke Canal was sold at auction on the 1st March 1949 for just £6,000





Harmsworth, but as I say carriage of coal ceased in 1935 and regular traffic in timber ended in 1947. The last commercial load was

on the 15th March 1949 when the barge Gwendoline with twenty standards of timber set off from the Surrey Docks on the Thames to

travel up the Wey Navigation to New Haw and thence onto the Basingstoke to Spanton's Wharf by Chertsey Road Bridge.

On the 15th March 1949 the last commercial load of timber to be carried on the canal was delivered to Spanton's Timber Yard by Chertsey Road Bridge





With vandalism and neglect the canal fell into disuse, with shopping trolleys and bicycles being dumped in the waterway.

On the 1st March 1949 the canal had been put up for auction including the 'valuable and industrial properties adjoining the canal' such as Spanton's Wharf which was apparently 'let on a lease to produce £80 per annum'. It raised £1,950 – although within twenty years it too would be closed and the land returned to the common land it once was.

As far as the canal itself was concerned the sale of 1949 amounted to just £6,000, but the

new owners – The New Basingstoke Canal Company – seemed to be more interested in the land rather than the waterway, although the sale of water (a commodity that the Basingstoke always found fairly short of supply) did play a part in their plans.

Mooring rights and fishing licences were virtually the only income, but whilst the canal undoubtedly had a good supply of fish to catch in the late 1940's it soon became clear that you

were more likely to hook a bike rather than a pike as the canal was slowly allowed to deteriorate! The locks were allowed to crumble, the waterway silted up and fly-tippers and vandals added to the canal's woes.

It would not be until the late 1960's that the future of the Basingstoke Canal began to look up again with the formation of the Surrey & Hampshire Canal Society, but that is another story.

