

THATS THE WEY TO DO IT.

Iain Wakeford 2018



With all the hustle and bustle taking place in and around Woking, I believe we are extremely lucky to have so much open countryside on our doorsteps – places like the Wey Navigation, which in 1964 was donated to the National Trust.

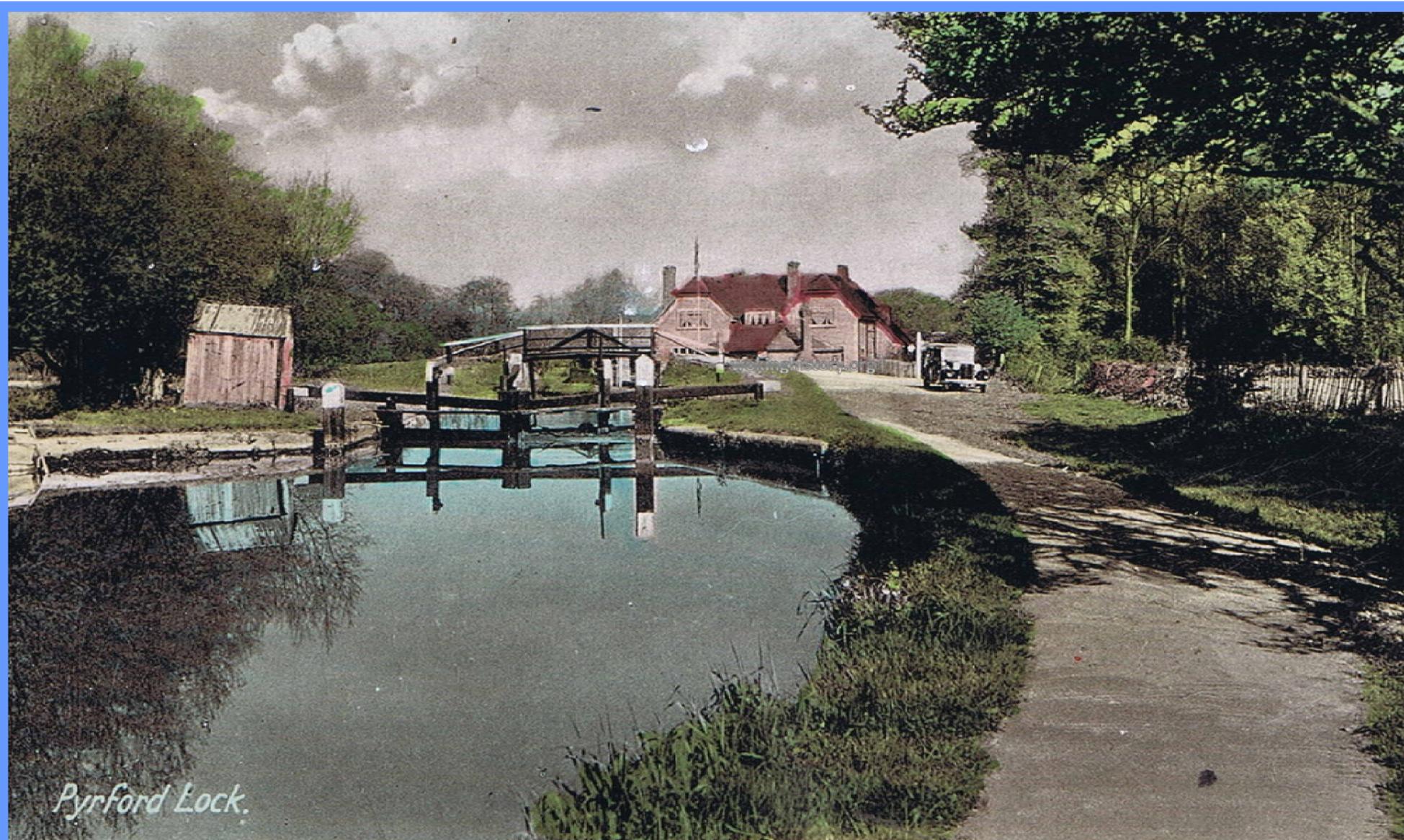
Some might find it odd that the charity should own such a site, but the waters of the Wey are

just as important from a recreational point of view as any Lake District mere, and the Navigation is as historic as any stately home in their care.

The waterway was the brainchild of Sir Richard Weston of Sutton Place, who in the early part of the 17th century built what he called 'my new ryver' to help irrigate the fields of his south Woking estate. In doing so he introduced to this

Originally the gates of the pound locks did not have sophisticated winding gear, but just paddles that could be lowered or lifted by means of a crowbar. Only a few of these mechanisms survive – such as at Walsham Lock at Pyrford and Worfold Gates at Send





country a new form of 'lock' on the waterway which not only allowed the water to flow into his new cut, but also allowed barges to easily navigate up and downstream by impounding the water between two sets of gates. Before he built his 'pound lock' at Stoke-next-Guildford only 'flash locks' were used on British waterways – really little more than a dam that when removed formed a flash of water over which the barges could be dragged up stream (or released down).

Having demonstrated the use of his new type of lock, he then sent about negotiating with landowners further down the Wey Valley to allow him to make the whole of the waterway better navigable from the Thames at Weybridge up as far as Guildford. Unfortunately the Civil War interrupted his plans (he being a Catholic and a Royalist), so when the Commonwealth Government came to power, his idea was promoted by the Corporation of Guildford – although almost entirely funded by the Weston

Family. Indeed by the time Sir Richard had died (shortly before his waterway was complete) he had sold part of his land to raise money for the scheme – an upstart Parliamentarian family by the name of Onslow taking over his West Clandon Estate!

The Anchor by Pyrford Lock was a popular place for the barges to stop and get refreshment, with stabling for their horses where the patio garden is now.



The Wey Navigation was completed in 1653, with something like two-thirds of its course new purpose-built sections, avoiding weirs and mills and cutting down the distance (and certainly the time) that it took to carry goods from London to Guildford (and vice-versa). That was long before the Duke of Bridgewater created his famous canal – taking the credit for ‘inventing’ a new method of transport that Sir Richard had demonstrated over a century before.

Unlike later canals, Sir Richard did not have the benefit of experienced ‘navvies’ to dig the cuts, build the locks, and erect the bridges over the new sections, so that local farm labourers appear to have been employed in the construction – with the result that on several occasions the new navigation burst its banks and flooded local fields. In the 1670’s there were many claims against the owners of the waterway, not just from farmers who fields were regularly inundated with water, but also by local labourers and tradesmen who had not been paid properly for their work or for materials supplied.



Cartbridge at Send in the early 20th century.

Amongst those was a John Trigg, a yeoman of Sutton in Woking, who claimed £5.13s for work he had carried out in 1655 – possibly at the

lock that bears his family name, where in the early 19th century a William Stevens was lock-keeper (with a salary of £10 per quarter).

William’s ancestors continued to work on the waterway, eventually taking over the ownership of the entire Navigation until Harry Steven, the last in a long line of bargees, retired in 1964 and gave it to the National Trust.

His generosity is often remarked upon, but the generosity of the Navigation’s founder – Sir Richard Weston – is often forgotten, as is his contribution to the history of ‘man-made’ waterways in this country.



The Stevens family owned the Navigation until 1964 when Harry Stevens gave the waterway to the National Trust.

