

# Didcot & District Archaeological and Historical Society

## **The Wilts and Berks Canal - The Past Present and Coming Soon**

**A talk by Martin Buckland Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> January 2017**

A packed Northbourne Church Hall (despite the bad weather) were able to listen to a very informative talk by Martin Buckland who showed he really knows his subject. Starting with an overview of the history of canals from their rise as industries found it a more efficient way of transporting their goods safely across the country as the roads at the time were no more than muddy tracks and on to their downfall as railways were constructed across the country and took over and became the new way of transporting goods.

The Wilts and Berks was opened in 1810 from a junction with the Kennet and Avon Canal in Wiltshire to the River Thames at Abingdon 67 miles in all this enabled coal to be transported from the Somerset coalfields to industries in Towns along the route namely in Melksham, Swindon, Wantage and Abingdon.

But by 1914 the Canal was abandoned and silted up and filled in along most of its length.

But enthusiasts in the 1960's alarmed at the loss of our heritage had an urge to reverse the situation across the country as the canal network fell into disrepair or were lost to development.

Many societies were created to stop the loss and with the long term aim of restoring and reopening the canal network.

The Wilts and Berks Canal Trust was founded in 1977 with the long term aim of reopening the complete length with diversions around developments already built on the old course of the canal

The canal trust has made many partnerships with the relevant county councils where the canal ran across their land and many local companies were brought on-board to provide their services.

Today there is a new junction with the River Thames south of Abingdon where eventually the canal will run across fields and under the A34 towards Wantage, Grove and beyond to the west but that is going to be many years ahead with the project running into millions.

David Taylor