

The Canal Society: The formation of PCAS

Pocklington Canal Amenity Society (PCAS) was formed to restore and protect canal for all to enjoy. It is a registered charity, run entirely by volunteers.

An initial idea

The society owes its origins to a local farmer, Eric Lount. He had spotted an out of date car sticker advertising 'Operation Ashton', a major volunteer led canal clearance scheme in Greater Manchester, which led to the restoration of the Ashton Canal. Eric Lount was keen to see a similar project on the rural Pocklington Canal. He then met David Tomlinson, who was working on the restoration of the Stourbridge Canal. After visiting Yorkshire, Tomlinson warmed to the idea of this restoration and further support for a restoration scheme soon followed.

In 1969 PCAS was formed, formally inaugurated on 1 January 1969 to restore the canal fully to navigation and as an attractive waterway for all to enjoy. Members came from all over, but were mainly local residents and farmers keen to see the overgrown and partly derelict canal restored.

Work begins

Following a year of lobbying and publicity, 40 volunteers took part in the first PCAS volunteer working party in January 1970, tackling the onslaught of trees and shrubs above Thornton Lock. Farmers assisted with tractors to help pull out larger shrubs. Working parties have continued to this day, restoring and maintaining the canal.

PCAS also began fundraising immediately after their formation, and soon donated £500 to British Waterways Board to carry out dredging using a dragline excavator. Cottingwith Lock, near to the junction with the River Derwent, was reopened in July 1971.

Before long PCAS working parties took on clearance of derelict lock chambers and repairs to the brickwork. A great deal of help came from local farmers and one successfully used his slurry pump to remove a large amount of accumulated silt. It spewed out eels and these were caught in buckets and transferred to clear water by children!

Restoration continued as far as the Melbourne Arm and this length was reopened on 19 July 1987 by Brian Dice, the then Chief Executive of BWB. The basin at Melbourne Arm had been enlarged to provide permanent and visitors' moorings for boats.

Present day

In 2015, PCAS launched a fundraising appeal for the restoration of a further two miles of canal, which would allow boats to travel as far as Bielby Arm. In July 2018, this newly restored section was reopened by Richard Parry, Chief Executive of the Canal & River Trust. The Trust, a registered charity, had previously taken over ownership of the canal from the British Waterways Board in 2012. PCAS works closely with other organisations, in particular the Trust, and Natural England, and continues to raise funding to support its work.

Looking ahead

Today the canal's future looks bright, with a vision for its entire restoration shared between PCAS and the Trust. One day, in the not too far future, we hope to see boats once again return to Canal Head.



Canal Head working party, PCAS



Cottingwith Lock, September 1969 PCAS



Extract from Double Nine, PCAS membership magazine (September 1970)