

22 July 2021

HANGING AROUND REPAIRING THE DUNDAS AQUEDUCT

A specialist abseiling team is working with waterways charity the Canal & River Trust to repair the historic Grade I listed Dundas Aqueduct on the Kennet & Avon Canal near Bath.

Suspended on ropes 12m (40 feet) above the Avon Valley, the team of stone masonry conservators will be carrying out specialist conservation repairs to the Georgian Bath stone mouldings of this iconic structure. Decades of exposure to the elements have left their mark, with some mouldings showing signs of cracking caused by freeze and thaw damage. Extensive restoration work was carried out in the early 2000s but the elements continue to take their toll on the fragile carved and decorative stonework of the classical detailing.

Morgan Cowles, Canal & River Trust heritage and environment manager, explains: “For decades this elegant structure carried narrow boats bearing coal, timber, Bath stone and other goods between Reading and Bristol. Commenced in 1796 it was built to take the canal across the Avon Valley, thus allowing a nine-mile long stretch from Bath to Bradford on Avon be completed without locks.

“In 1954 it developed a leak and was taken out of use. In the 1960s and 70s it was completely drained, meaning people were able to walk along it. It was re-opened, complete with water, in 1984 and since then has taken on a new life, welcoming hundreds of leisure and lived-on boats to gently cruise along its 140m length.

“The Canal & River Trust is conserving the aqueduct for future generations and ensuring it survives another 200+ years to give more people the chance to enjoy life by water on this stunning piece of canal history.”

Built c. 1805 by John Rennie, Dundas Aqueduct is the architectural jewel in the crown of the structures on the Kennet & Avon Canal: a classically designed masterpiece on a monumental scale carved from local Bath limestone. It is an iconic landmark of the waterways, carrying the canal over the River Avon Valley below, and is designated both as a Grade I Listed Building and a Scheduled Ancient Monument (with an equivalent level of importance and protection to monuments such as Stonehenge).

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Dundas Aqueduct was named after Charles Dundas, the first chairman of the Kennet & Avon Canal Company. In 1951 it became the first canal structure to be designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

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