

Rickmansworth Waterways Trust

Strolls from the Lock Number 16 – A figure of eight centred on Batchworth Lock

Time approximately 1 hr 25 min

Distance 3.4 miles

Part 1 Batchworth Lock Centre to just below Lot Mead Lock and return

Time: approximately 40min.

Distance: approximately 1.4miles.

The Grand Junction Canal at Batchworth was completed in 1797 but the name changed to ‘Grand Union Canal’ in 1929 after amalgamation with other canal companies. By 1806 it linked London, Birmingham and Leicester. All goods required by a newly industrialised country were carried, including coal, agricultural products and manufactured items. Trade continued after the arrival of the railways, eventually ceasing by the 1960’s. The buildings at Batchworth, including the Lock Centre, originally comprised two pubs (the ‘Railway Tavern’ above and the ‘Boat’ below) plus stables, necessary for the passing cargo-carrying narrow boats. The hayloft doorway can be seen above. The Grand Union is a ‘wide’ canal as all the locks on this canal can accommodate a pair of boats 72feet long by 7feet wide.

Pass the Lock Centre on the left and walk alongside the nearest lock, onto a bridge over a weir (notice the fish ladder on the far side) then alongside a canalised section of the River Chess, known as Salter’s Cut. The river continues over the weir to enter the River Colne a short distance away. This side arm of the main canal system was originally built by Samuel Salter in 1805 to connect with his brewery. It was later used to supply coal to the gas works at Town Wharf (just off Talbot Road) and allow access to the now defunct railway which ran to Watford. Batchworth station was on the site of the present St Mary’s Court. It also serviced a small gravel pit, now flooded (Sabey’s Pool). Much of this arm has now been filled in or is not navigable, but the Chess Basin, where goods passed between canal and rail, is used for permanent moorings. The entrance to the Basin is through a lifting bridge.

Follow the path past a small car park on the left and turn right onto the Ebury Way. This runs alongside a wooden fence which blocks sight of the Basin, although this can be seen from a small bridge a little further along. The Ebury Way follows the line of the railway (opened 1862, closed to passengers in 1952 and to freight after the Beeching Report of 1968) and passes over Salter’s Cut, which is not navigable from this point. Further on, to left and right, are a series of flooded gravel pits now used for fishing.

After about 20minutes, there is a signpost showing access to the Grand Union Canal towpath on the R. However, before leaving the Ebury Way, walk further on to a bridge over the canal from where you can see Lot Mead lock on the left with associated cottages. The River Gade joins the canal just to the right of the lock. Once on the towpath, turn R to return to Batchworth Lock.

This stretch (or ‘pound’, which is the canal between two locks) has many permanent houseboats. The River Colne joins the canal on the far side just before the first moored boat and a lock marker post (the first boat to reach this was entitled to enter the lock first) and a distance marker can be seen at the side of the towpath. The canal from here to Batchworth was built by canalising the river, although parts were subsequently straightened after a boat sunk on one of the bends. The towpath then passes over a weir, one of several in this area (bridge dated 1895).

Just before Batchworth Lock, a branch continues straight on, and the canal bends around to the right. The branch passes through Batchworth Mill where water drove machinery for weaving silk and cloth and then, from 1818, for paper making. The Mill is now used by a water company. An obelisk in the garden of one of the houses on the far side of the canal was used to measure water levels – mill owners were worried that the canal might abstract their supplies. An inscription on this relates to an agreement between the owners of the Grand Junction Canal and of Moor Park estate in 1823. At that time, Batchworth lock had ground paddles only (letting water into the lock at ground level), but not gate paddles (which lets water into the lock through the gates). This meant that water would slowly enter the lock so that the water level would not drop suddenly and affect the mill machinery. Just before the lock, excess canal water passes back to the river over a weir. There is also a small stream passing under the canal here. Plaques at the lock record when the lock chamber was reconstructed (1866 and 1868). The capacity of the lock is 60,000gallons (272,765 litres) and has a drop of 6ft 8in (just over 2meters).

These walks are written by Jillian Christensen and are provided free by The Rickmansworth Waterways Trust but a minimum donation of 20p is suggested to help support our education programme. Thank you!

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Part 2 Batchworth Lock Centre to Stockers Lock and return

Time: approximately 45min.

Distance: approximately 2miles.

On arriving back at the Lock Centre, walk under the road bridge and along the towpath to an iron bridge over a river. This is the River Colne, which flows across the canal here and continues on through the Aquadrome. It is joined by the River Chess at this point. The site now occupied by Tesco was once the boat building yard of W.H. Walker and Brothers Ltd. The company was founded in 1905, the last boat built in 1952, and the yard closed in 1989. The shape of the bow of narrow boats was specific to where they were built – Walker's boats were called 'Ricky' boats.

Go through the gate immediately after the iron bridge into the Aquadrome, and walk straight on alongside the River Colne. The lakes of the Colne Valley are flooded gravel pits, worked out by the 1950's. The one here on the left is Batchworth Lake, now used for water skiing. You will pass the club house for this a little further on.

The track turns to the left around the head of this lake. A little further on, Bury Lake, now used for sailing, can be seen on the right. Walk along the right side of Bury Lake and then turn left. The track passes between Bury Lake and Stockers Lake on the R. Stockers Lake is a nature reserve, famous for over-wintering water birds and has the largest heronry in Hertfordshire. All these lakes used to have access to the canal so that sand and gravel could be transported away by boats.

At an information board, turn right to follow a path through a small field and onto the canal towpath at Stockers Lock. There are several interesting buildings here – an old lock cottage, a large tax-collectors house (1860) and the group of buildings comprising Stockers Farm (17th century) on the far side of the canal, often used by film companies. Dates on the lock indicate that it was rebuilt in 1885.

Turn left here and follow the towpath back to Batchworth Lock. However, if you walk under the lock bridge you will see grooves in the iron bars running down its edges, caused by friction from tow ropes between horse and boat. There is a coal post by the towpath on the other side of the bridge, marking the place where tolls became payable for cargo coming into London. These posts are found alongside canals, roads and tracks at a distance of 20 miles from the General Post Office in central London. The toll was abolished in 1889. The lock is a 'gauging lock', whereby the amount of duty payable was found by measuring the depth of the boat in the water.

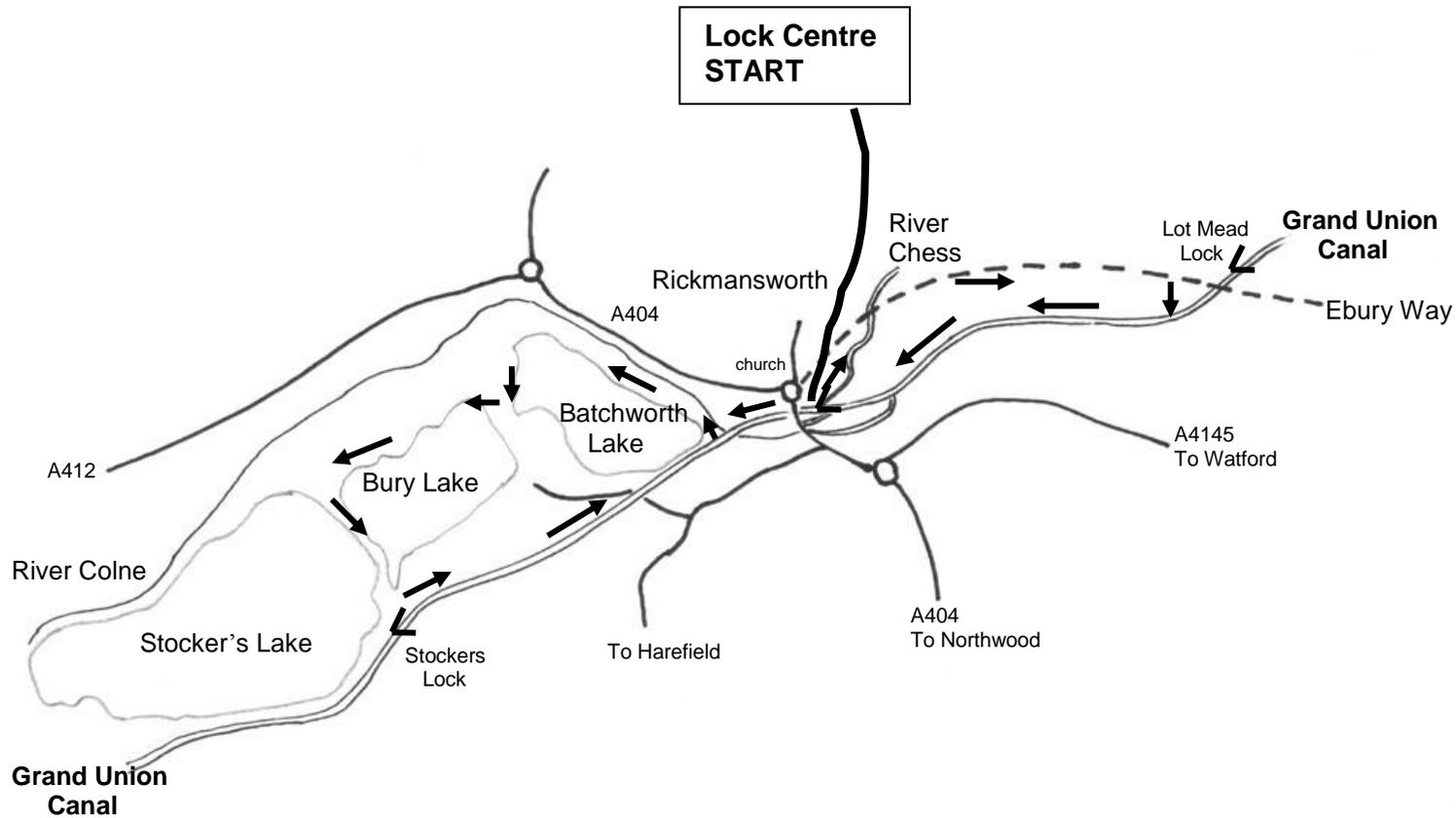
Further along the tow path towards Batchworth there is pillbox on the far side of the canal, part of defences against invasion in WW2. Nearer the next bridge there is a milepost giving a distance of 75 miles to Braunston, in the Midlands. This would have taken about 3 days for a pair of working boats. All distances and the bridge number are calculated from Braunston, which was originally at the end of the Grand Junction Canal.

The narrow boat 'Roger' may be moored just before the bridge near the lock centre. This was one of the last wooden boats built, dating from 1936. It was rescued from dereliction and restored back to its original state by the Rickmansworth Waterways Trust. It is now used as part of their educational programme.

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