



CAMPAIGNERS The historic Latton Basin which campaigners hope to save and, inset, how it looks today. Below, members of the Wilts, Berks and Cotswolds Canal trusts launch their preservation campaign to save the basin near Cricklade

Three generations hope to preserve Latton Basin

A DRIVE TO SAVE LINK WITH CANAL HISTORY

by Matt Jackson

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THERE was a furious programme of work going on near Swindon two centuries ago, as canal builders rushed to link the town with the national network.

The North Wilts Canal was built in the early 1800s to provide a link between the Thames & Severn Canal and Swindon on the Wilts & Berks Canal.

The work was needed because it was practically impossible to navigate the Upper Thames from Swindon.

So a shipment basin was built at Latton, near Cricklade, at the junction of the North Wilts and Thames and Severn canals.

It allowed cargoes to be moved between boats of differing sizes.

The link from Swindon to the Thames and Severn Canal was completed in 1819.

A tollkeeper's cottage and lock



were built at Latton, as well as two aquaducts.

One carried the canal over the River Churn and the other allowed floodwater to run off the land under the canal.

Unfortunately, with the coming of the railways in the early 20th Century, the canals fell into disuse.

The last lockkeeper at Latton Basin bought the cottage, and he

and his descendants lived there for many years.

Alfred and Anne Howse had eight daughters and three sons.

Now, though, plans are afoot to bring life back to Latton Basin.

Over the weekend three generations of the Howse family kick-started a canal preservation campaign. They met with members of two canal trusts to highlight the need to safeguard the

historic site.

Representatives from the Wilts & Berks and Cotswold Canal trusts launched the initiative to restore parts of Latton Basin.

This time Latton Basin is unlikely to see any passing boat traffic, because a new route around Cricklade is planned for the Wilts & Berks Canal.

But both canal trusts are keen to see some work on the site to preserve an important part of the area's history.

Ken Oliver, chief executive of the Wilts and Berks Canal Trust, said: "It was an excellent meeting. We had between 50 and 60 people here. Everyone agrees that we should try to make the preservation work a reality."

Trust archivist Doug Small said: "The current condition of the basin and its surroundings are good."

"But urgent attention must now be given to not only preserve, but also to restore, some of the largest, original structures on the canal."