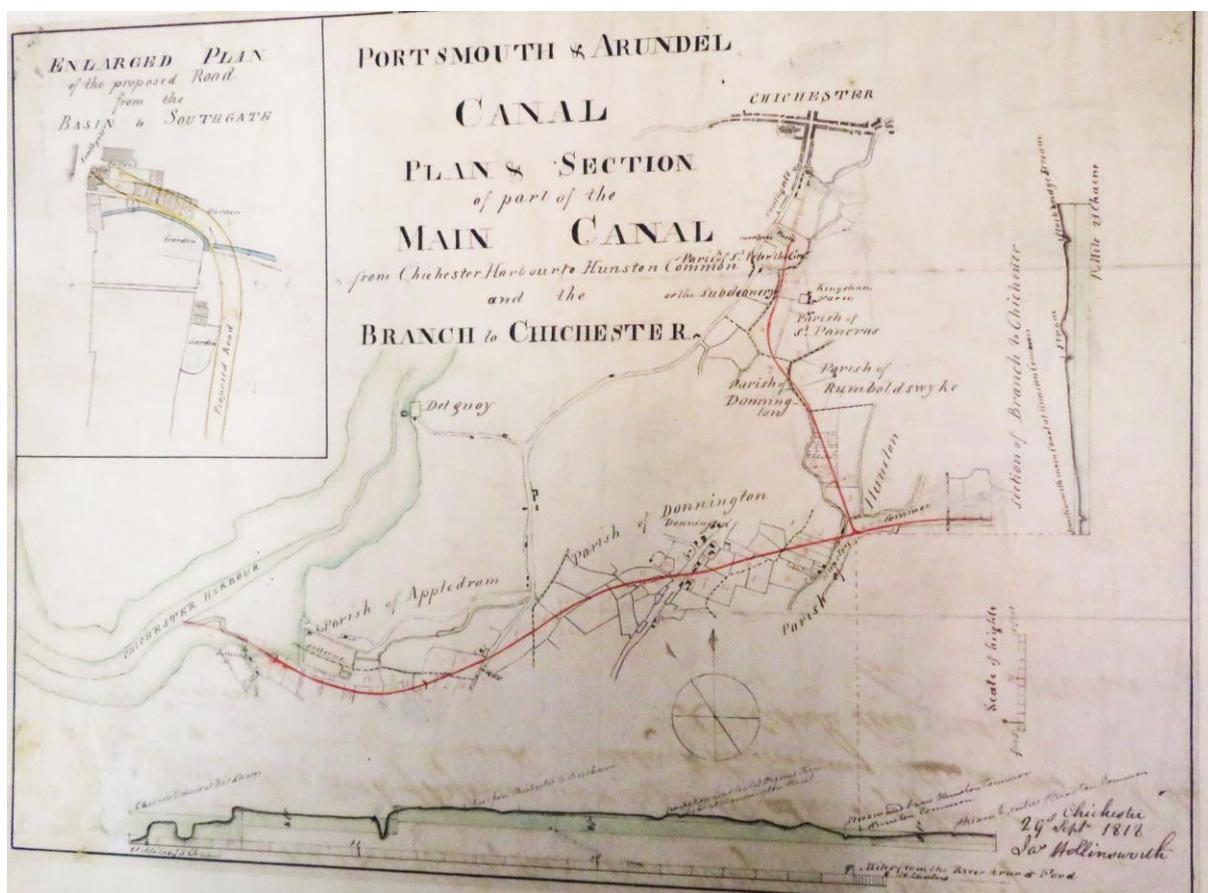


LOCAL HISTORY 2 - APRIL 2022 CHICHESTER SHIP CANAL HERITAGE CENTRE

Our first outing of 2022 took place on a gloriously sunny day in April when we met at Chichester Canal Basin for an informative and interesting talk, given by Lynda Hunter and her husband, on the history of the Chichester Ship Canal whose 200th anniversary is being celebrated this year.



The canal was built as part of the Portsmouth and Arundel Canal which was conceived as part of a bigger plan to provide a secure inland canal route from London to Portsmouth, enabling supplies needed during the Napoleonic Wars to reach Portsmouth faster than by the previous sea route.



Proposals for a canal linking Chichester directly to the sea go back as least as far as 1585 when an act of parliament was passed allowing a cut linking Chichester with the sea and further proposals were made in the early 19th century. Eventually the canal began construction in 1819, after enough shares were bought to pay for what turned out to be a costly over-budget build. The section between Chichester and Chichester Harbour, unlike the rest of the canal, was built to be large enough to carry boats of 100 tons which added to the cost. We learnt that six local brickworks were established to build the two large basins and that six locks, 17 bridges and 21 iron swing bridges plus a pumping station had to be constructed.



After three years of hard work, there was a Grand Opening of the Canal on 9th April 1822 where not all went to plan as the Company's steam tug 'Egremont' (named after Lord Egremont who had invested thousands of pounds in the scheme) ran aground at Emsworth, leaving various dignitaries stranded.

Unfortunately for the investors, by the time the route was completed, the war with France had ended. With the reason for its construction removed plus competition coming from faster steam ships and then steam trains, the Canal was not a commercial success, and apart from the Chichester section, it had fallen into disuse by 1847.



Not until the 1950s did any restoration take place but the major work happened after 1973 when the Sussex Canal Trust was formed with the objective of restoring navigation on the Chichester section. In 1992 the Canal reopened and the 5th 'Egremont', a narrow boat, was launched. Then in 2002 the Chichester Ship Canal Trust started; a registered charity, which has many members and volunteers. Their aim is to keep the Canal open for present and future generations to enjoy.

Activities and events on offer at the Heritage Centre include guided walks, art exhibitions, dragon boat races, musical performances, boat trips and boat hire and much more. See their website at <https://chichestercanal.org.uk/> for more information.

Our afternoon was rounded off by cream tea and cake followed by, for some of us, a walk by this delightful stretch of the Canal.

