

# Baughurst Parish Council

## Baughurst Canal and Railway Mania

### Introduction

In 2013 Stan Terrett (a long serving councillor of Baughurst Parish Council) published his book "Baughurst..a history" which provided some fascinating insights into Baughurst and the people who lived here up until the around 1940s. We wanted to pay tribute to this fine work and the earlier "Memories of Baughurst" – a collection of reminiscences – by extracting stories about places and people of Baughurst for you.

In this article we look at how canals and railways almost came to Baughurst.

### Canal Mania

In the eighteenth century, trade between towns and villages increased due to improvements in transportation, horses and carts for conveying people and goods were being superseded.

Canal building gripped the country in the second half of the eighteenth century when many were constructed as a means of carrying goods in bulk at a cheap price in order to maintain the impetus of the Industrial Revolution. Canals were needed locally to export agricultural products to the large towns, such as London and Bristol, and import coal and finished goods.

The important waterways in this area were the River Thames (although navigation was difficult), Kennet and Avon Canal (from Bath to Newbury opened in 1810), the River Kennet (navigable from Newbury to Reading from 1723, but very costly to use), the Thames (difficult and intermittent navigation) and the Basingstoke Canal (opened from the River Wey to Basingstoke in 1796). These carried much trade, especially during the wars against Spain and Napoleon when coastal trade was too risky.

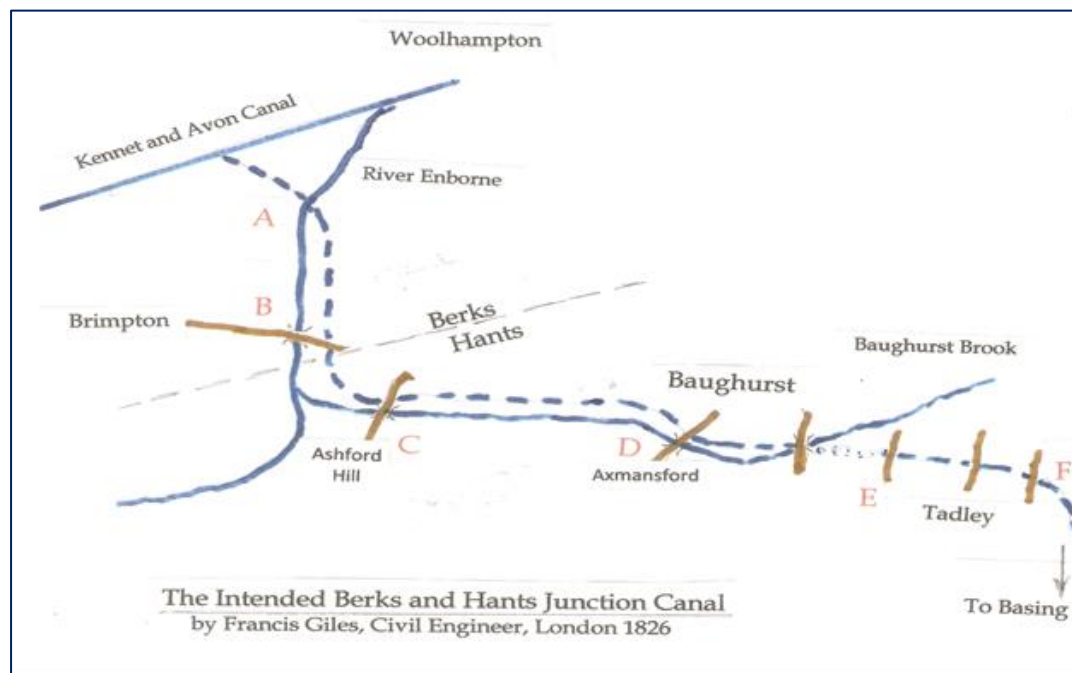
The Basingstoke Canal had changed the face of local agriculture with a market for local produce and the carriage eastwards of lime (from the chalk downlands) to sweeten (reduce the acidity) the areas of heathland. On the return journey it carried coal, metals and ashes (as manure for root crops).



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However, it became a failure as after the Napoleon Wars in 1815, the coastal routes were open again and soldiers and horses back from the wars started up as cheap carriers.

Not many canals in the south were successful, the route from Bristol and Bath to London was plagued with problems. The Thames below Reading had few locks and exorbitant fees. Therefore, alternatives were sought by the Kennet and Avon Company. Firstly, John Rennie was engaged to survey a 21-mile-long by-pass line from Enborne to Basing via Brimpton and Wolverton, but this was soon abandoned. Alternately a scheme was devised with the Basingstoke Canal Company which would be much shorter. The survey for a Berks and Hants Junction Canal was carried out in 1824 by Francis Giles, a colleague of John Rennie. He proposed a canal nearly 13 miles long from Midgham to Basing with 12 or 13 locks. The summit level was to be fed by an engine raising water 50 ft from the River Enborne via a one mile long pipe.



The route of the proposed canal started near Woolhampton, over an aqueduct over the River Kennet, then Brimpton, another aqueduct over the River Enborne (A), across the road from Brimpton to Brimpton Common (B), then the Ashford Hill road near the Ship Inn (C). It continued north of the Water Meadow, by Great Haughurst Copse, across Wolverton Road above Axmansford (D), across the stream on Violet Lane then into a ½ mile long tunnel under the Baughurst Road near Oak House (E). Past Church Brook in



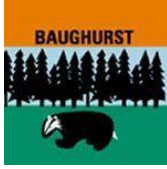
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Tadley and over the Basingstoke Road (F) where it turned south passing Pamber End, the Vyne, Chineham and Basing, joining the Basingstoke Canal near Basing House.

Opposition to the scheme was fierce as a new canal meant other carriers losing trade (eg the Commissioners for the Thames Navigation), local towns/parishes not near the canal feared they would be isolated and landowners didn't want their estates bisected. A Bill dated 1825 was submitted on grounds giving a direct inland communication between South Wales, Bristol, Bath and London but was rejected because of the strong opposition, inaccurate costing and low dividends paid by the proposed canal.



*Image 1 This could have been a local sight.*

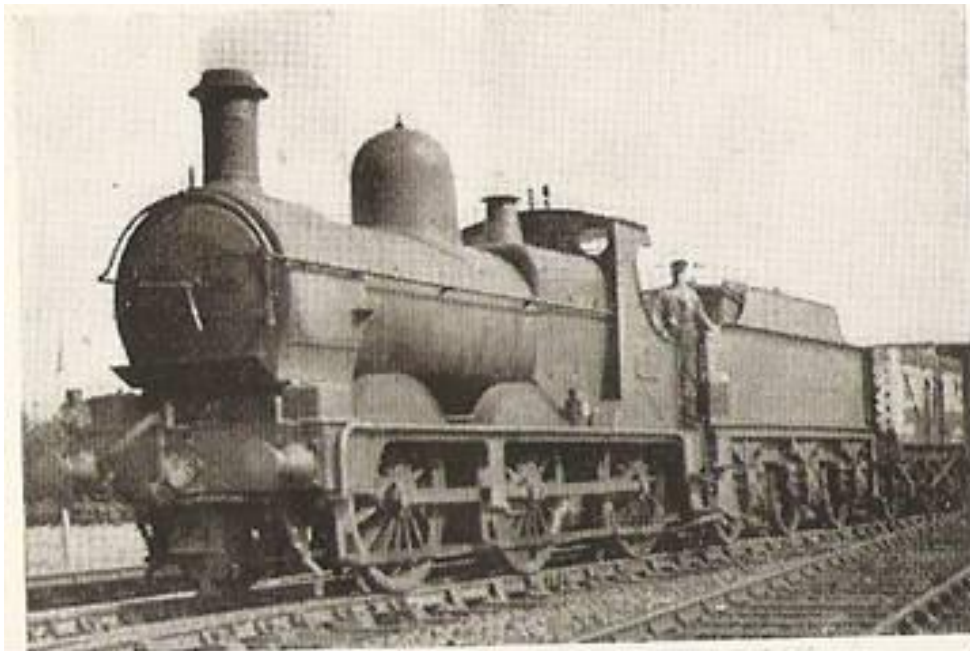


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## Railway Mania

With a dearth of money, lack of adequate water and deterioration of the canals together with an increase in the number and quality of turnpike roads with tolls having to be paid, railways were considered as an alternative means of transport. The Basingstoke Canal carried much material for the construction of the London to Southampton Railway which opened to Basingstoke in 1839. Speculators also proposed schemes for routes from the North and the Midlands to south coast ports in order to carry cargoes and coal for the new steam-driven ships. Therefore, as these required the same flat routes, the canals were directly threatened – the Kennet and Avon by the Great Western Railway and the Basingstoke by the London to Southampton Railway.

In 1844 it was ironic that Francis Giles, the designer of the Berks and Hants Canal and now the Engineer of the London to Southampton railway, included in his plans a rail connection from Basingstoke to Newbury along the route of his planned canal. It was not along the exact route, as it deviated at Axmansford going southwards past Ramsdell Brickworks on its way towards Basingstoke station. This proposed line was never built, possibly overtaken by the Reading to Basingstoke line, built in 1848.



*Image 2 This could have been a view near Baughurst.*



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There was great rivalry between all railway companies, for example, the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway was an attempt at a north-south link which was planned to run to Southampton from Newbury via Micheldever. However, after protracted fighting between the speculators, the Great Western Railway (owners of the line at Didcot and Newbury) and the London and South Western Railway (owners of the Basingstoke to Southampton line) it was altered to run through Woodhay, Highclere, Burghclere and Whitchurch. It belatedly opened between 1885 and 1891 which was too late for the intended trade – it closed in 1960 for passengers and for trade in 1964.

Another line that was proposed but never built was from the above line at Burghclere to Aldermaston Station running via Kingsclere and Shalford Bridge near Brimpton. Interestingly, a notice was issued for a forthcoming auction for Grantham Farm, Baughurst in 1884 stated that the farm was 2 miles from the proposed new station at Abel Bridge (over the River Enborne near Brimpton Common).

The determination to build a railway in this area did not stop, in 1899 a proposal was made to construct a 13-mile Highclere, Kingsclere and Basingstoke Light Railway. It was to commence one mile south of Burghclere (on the above Didcot, Newbury and Southampton line) with stations south of Ecchinswell, just north of the current A339 roundabout at Kingsclere, near the vicarage on the Ewhurst Road at Ramsdell and on to Basingstoke. Among the benefits cited was 'the need to remove the numerous traction engines which are a considerable source of danger and cause much damage to the roads'. Although there were many pledges of money – including from the Duke of Wellington; the Earl of Carnarvon; Queen's College, Oxford and Mr Singleton of Baughurst House – this proposal did not succeed. One of the main reasons was because the internal combustion engine was beginning to revolutionise transport.