

Photograph – Canal Restoration at Ty Coch, Cwmbran.

Volunteering Matters

There are many opportunities to volunteer for the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust (MBACT). As well as working in partnership with Newport City Council at Fourteen Locks, MBACT also works successfully with Torfaen County Borough Council at Ty Coch, Cwmbran. This is another Heritage Lottery Funded Project that is also having a very positive impact on canal regeneration. Volunteers are also needed for the Trip Boat and for Special Events.

Contact

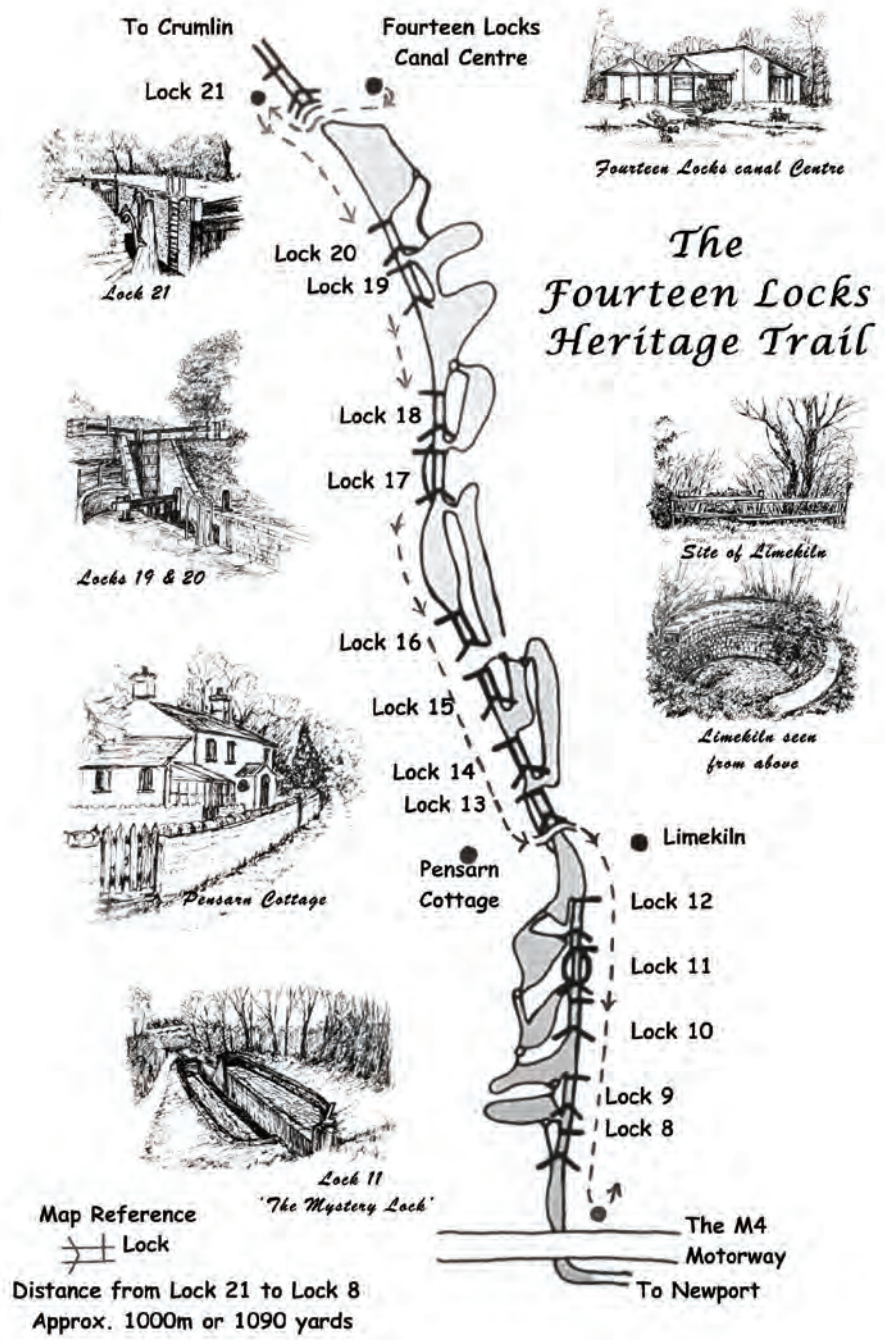
The Fourteen Locks Canal Centre on 01633 892167
or go online

<http://www.mbact.org.uk/support.php>



Fourteen Locks A New Beginning





The volunteers have had a very positive impact on the unrestored sections of the Lock Flight, making the environment better for visitors and for wildlife.





A New Beginning at Fourteen Locks

The rich heritage of the Cefn Flight of Fourteen Locks and its potential as an 'Eco Systems Service Provider' made it an attractive opportunity for restoration and wider audience access and development. The vision to be able to see this opportunity drew together in partnership the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust (MBACT) and Newport City Council. As a direct result of significant financial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the support of other funders the Education Through Restoration Project (ETR) came into being in 2008. This project enabled the successful restoration of two pairs of locks and enhanced educational use of the site. The most recent Heritage Lottery Funded Programme – 'The Fourteen Locks Future Skills Project' has taken another positive step forward by developing volunteering and training opportunities and increased community involvement at the site.



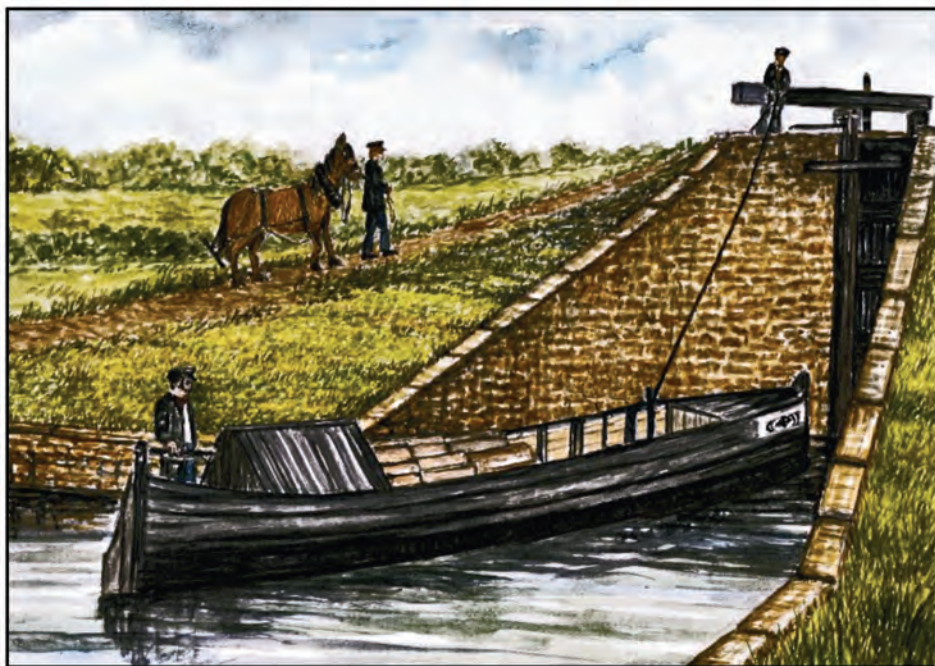
A Brief History of Fourteen Locks

The Industrial Revolution, especially the production of 'pig iron' at ironworks such as Nantyglo and Blaenavon in the valleys of South Wales, created a transport revolution. An integrated network of canals and horse drawn tramroads was the answer. The Monmouthshire Canal was authorised by Act of Parliament in 1792 and the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal was authorised in 1793. The Monmouthshire Canal was completed around 1799, but it was not until 1812, when it was joined by the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal, that a boat journey from Newport to Brecon became possible. It was an immense undertaking involving the construction of 74 locks on the Monmouthshire Canal!

For a while the canal network was very busy. Gas lighting was installed at Fourteen Locks in the 1820s so that empty boats could be moved at night. However, by the middle of the nineteenth century the Monmouthshire Canal Company wanted to close the canal and develop its railway interests. There were too many protests so it became the Monmouthshire Railway and Canal Company (MRCC). From this point onwards it concentrated on the railway and use of the canal slowly declined.

The MRCC bought the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal in 1865 to safeguard the water supply to Newport. In 1875 the day-to-day running of the company was transferred to the GWR. In 1880 the GWR bought the company and the two canals became known as the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canals.

The last significant commercial use of Fourteen Locks was in the 1920's, while the last toll was recorded in 1935 for three boat journeys carrying furniture. The Lock Keeper at this time was Dai Brookes who lived in a canal cottage that used to stand just opposite the site of the present canal centre. His brother Jack Brookes, who lived in Pensarn Cottage, was the last person to look after the lock flight, when it was no longer being used by boats. Today, the locks are owned by Newport City Council and it is hoped to restore them back to full operational use.



An artist's impression of how the Cefn Flight of Fourteen Locks may have looked during the Nineteenth Century.



Fourteen Locks c.1900

Fond Memories of Fourteen Locks



'The Pad and The Stone'

Bathing in the canal was 'strictly forbidden' by the Great Western Railway Company, nevertheless in an age without the luxury of indoor swimming pools many young lads did not take any notice of this rule! These are the memories of Wilfred Pooley aged 89 of Rogerstone, who learnt to swim at Fourteen Locks.

'My earliest memories of swimming at Fourteen Locks go back to when I was twelve. My mother would pack me off with two pieces of bread pudding and I would spend all day at the canal swimming and when I get home my ears would be waterlogged! I remember that there was always a crowd of boys, maybe ten or twelve of us.

Beginners would start off learning to swim 'doggy paddle' at a place we called 'The Pad' where it was quite shallow. Stronger swimmers would swim at a place we called 'The Stone' where it was much deeper. The banks of the locks were steep and running, jumping and diving were all part of the fun. You could dive a long way into the canal after a short run.

Fond Memories of Fourteen Locks



Swimmers pictured at Fourteen Locks c.1900

I remember one day a group of us decided to go 'skinny dipping', but it wasn't such a good idea really, because a nursemaid came along with a pram and decided to sit down on the balance beam of one of the lock gates. She sat there for a very long time and it wasn't the warmest of days. It seemed like ages before we were able to get out! It makes me laugh to think of it now.'

Leslie Guy also had good childhood memories at Fourteen Locks!

In his young years Leslie lived at 4 Rogerstone Terrace, which later became 76 Tregwillm Road. Like many young lads of his time he spent much of his free time at Fourteen Locks, that is when he wasn't running errands for his mother!

Fond Memories of Fourteen Locks

The Memories of Leslie Guy continued –

“There was always a crowd swimming at the locks during summer holidays. It didn't matter when it got dark because we would light a fire to keep warm. Half the time no costumes were worn and on Saturday and Sunday it was really packed out. Whatever the leader did everyone just followed, even diving from the top of a lock. The lock keepers did not seem to mind us boys swimming in the canal. By the time we got home we would be starving, although sometimes if we were lucky enough we had a few tit bits from Mr. Crabb's Bakery.”

Leslie remembers workmen from No. 6 Mill at Guest, Keen & Nettlefolds going to the Lock 20 Pound after work with steel handling tongs -

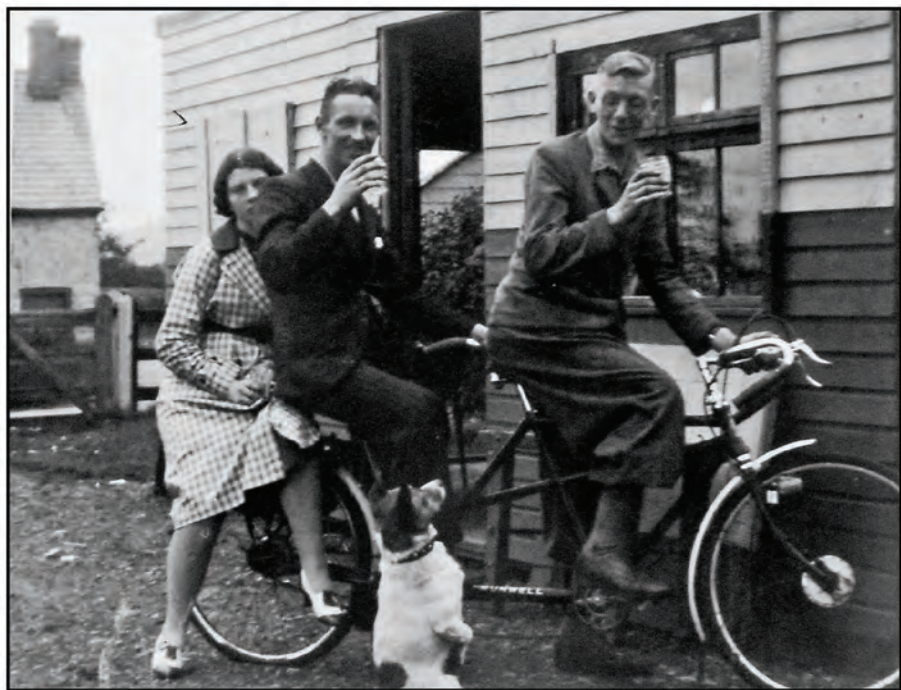
“They would close the bottom gates of Lock 21 and then open the ground paddles for Lock 20 draining Lock 20 Pound. This left an expanse of mud and a tiny stream of water near the towing path. They would then take off their boots and roll up their trousers and slide down the banking into the mud. Eels that were in the mud would eventually poke their heads above the surface only to be grabbed by the men and thrown to the bank using their tongs. It was not unusual to see as many as a dozen eels, which made a good meal for the men and their families.”

Bowen's Boats

Many local people have happy memories of Bowen's Boats, which used to be located by Lock 21 – just behind the Canal Centre. The photographs opposite that you are able to enjoy today come from the family album of Pam Manning, daughter of Richard and Rosa Bowen who owned 'Bowen's Boats'. Richard (Dick) Bowen is pictured in the top photo with spectacles and a cigarette on the landing stage that he built to assist customers when getting into the boats. Pam is the little girl with her hands behind her back. If you look carefully you can just make out Lock 21 at the top of the photograph and the ice-cream shack with a single pitch roof in the top right hand corner.



Bowen's Boats – Lock 21, Fourteen Locks c.1950



Is there a link with Newport Castle?



At first glance the construction of the locks looks very similar, but look closely and you will notice that there are differences in the construction of each lock, especially in the types of building material used. One of the most interesting possibilities to emerge from the restoration of Locks 17 – 20 was that the Lock Flight could have been built using stone from other structures.

What do we know? Locks 20 - 17 have been constructed with a variety of types of stone and a variety of finishes, including large amounts of old red sandstone, which tends to suggest that the stone originated from a variety of sources.

Research of the Minutes of the Monmouthshire Canal Company provided some fascinating insights into how the Company operated at the time when the Lock Flight was constructed. It was not as straight forward as one might have assumed!

Is there a link with Newport Castle?



The minutes of the Canal Company seem to show that the contractor was responsible for obtaining the stone for the locks and that there were complaints about how it was done.

Fiftieth Meeting of the Committee of the Company of Proprietors of the Monmouthshire Canal Navigation held at the Westgate House Inn in the town of Newport on Wednesday the 25th day of November 1795

'Walter Waters having offered to build the 15 locks as marked out intended to be erected between Kevan and Altereen Farm on the Crumlin Line on the terms following - For raising Stone, halling and setting the Masonwork at the rate of Seven Shillings per Perch of 36 cubic feet. Raising, halling and setting the Trunks stones at Four Shillings per yard superficial measure. Finding and hauling the stones and sheeting the bottom of the Locks at Three Shillings per superficial yard. Cutting the several Lock pits at Five Pence per cube yard and backing the said 15 locks at £10 each. The Company only to find Lime, Sand, Barrows, Planks and Water in the Canal close to the Upper Lock.'

Is there a link with Newport Castle?

Sixtieth Meeting of the Committee of the Company of Proprietors of the Monmouthshire Canal Navigation held at the Crown and Anchor Inn in the town of Pontypool on Tuesday 2nd August 1796

'Ordered that Mr Henry Phillips do value the trespass committed on John William John's Land on Crumlin Line in digging Stone for lock building and that Morgan Parry do enquire of Walter Walters respecting his disposing of tile stone from said premises.'

The old red sandstone used to construct the locks is remarkably similar to that of Newport Castle and if castle walls were demolished when the canal was constructed it would seem likely that they would have been used again. This being said, old red sandstone quarries were quite numerous in the area, so it would need the discovery of stones that could be traced back to the castle to be quite certain. For example, the discovery of a stone with an architectural detail or medieval mason's mark. While some interesting stones have been identified, no definitive stones have been discovered yet.



The mason's mark shown here is not thought to be medieval. It is likely that it is consistent with the construction of the locks and was probably made for the identification of a particular stone mason for the purpose of payment.

Is there a link with Newport Castle?

To make matters more confusing the minutes of The Monmouthshire Canal Company show the purchase of a considerable amount of stone in 1801.

Proceedings at the Hundred and Thirty Eighth Meeting of the Committee of the Company of Proprietors of the Monmouthshire Canal Navigation held at the Westgate House Inn in Newport a Monday the 19th day of October 1801 pursuant to Adjournment.

'Ordered that Mr Jones of Llanarth be paid for the Stones taken from to Tynycum Quarry for 3185 tons at 3d per Ton.'
In 1802 the Canal Company endeavoured to pay for stone used.

Proceedings at the Hundred and Fifty Fourth Meeting of the Committee of the Company of Proprietors of the Monmouthshire Canal Navigation held over Navigation Office in Newport on Tuesday the 1st day of February 1803 pursuant to Adjournment.

'Ordered that Mr Rudder and Mr Hodgkinson be requested to wait on Mr Phillips of Risca to endeavour to settle with him about the Stones taken from his Quarry.'

Are these late payments for stone used to construct locks and bridges - or are they payments for other projects? If they are indeed late payments, it would seem likely that some of this stone ended up at Fourteen Locks.

Historical study, as you can see, does not always give an answer to questions about the past. At the time of their construction it is most likely that the emphasis was on speed – time was money! No one thought to record just how the locks were constructed for the interest of future historians! Perhaps the answer is that some of the stone was recycled and some of it purchased; more evidence will be needed to have a more definitive view.

Lock 11 - 'The Mystery Lock'



The Cefn Flight of Locks is made up of one single lock, five pairs of locks and one triple set of locks. Lock 11 is located in the middle of the latter and argument surrounds the date of construction, the purpose of the shelves and just how the lock was used. The debate surrounding this 'Mystery Lock' is fascinating and has continued to create great interest amongst visitors exploring the site today. The following 'Waterways World' articles printed in 1975 gives some measure of the different ideas that have been put forward:

The highlight of this branch of the Monmouthshire Canal is the incredible and astonishing fourteen locks at High Cross, Rogerstone. Cefn Locks must be one of the most remarkable (but least known) structures on the canals anywhere in Britain. Now half hidden in the trees, like something left behind by the Incas, the locks stride dramatically over 150 ft up the hill like a "double-Foxton". Yet although the fourteen locks are built in pairs, this is not a staircase - the deep chambers are separated by about half a boat's length.

Lock 11 – ‘The Mystery Lock’

One of the locks, known as “sea Lock”, has curiously, a widened section at the top of the chamber, built as I have been told, to enable boats to pass each other, though I think this most unlikely since a passing place exists half-way up the flight. More likely, it was designed to pass a greater volume of water down to the possibly deeper lock below it.

It is well worth a visit for her, in an unlikely corner of Gwent, is one of the least known but most impressive examples of engineering works of the industrial revolution which can be included in the “Wonders of the Waterways” category.’ - RWS

The following article was prompted by the above:

‘I spent the summer of 1968 working in South Wales and spent most of my spare time exploring the local canal system so I was delighted to see your February feature on the Monmouthshire Canal.

However I must take issue with you on the function of the (now) famous “Sea Lock”. My personal discovery of this lock was quite unexpected and I still remain fascinated by it to this day.

After repeated visits I came to my own conclusion that the “Sea Lock” was a passing place for the following reasons. Firstly, that particular canal, in its heyday, was extremely busy and a simple division of yearly tonnage by average boat capacity shows the enormous number of boat journeys which were made - resulting in virtual non-stop operation of the canal and the flight of locks in particular. Secondly you fail to mention that although the other locks are semi-staircase pairs, the “Sea Lock” is in the middle of a semi-staircase trio and I think this is the critical feature. Thirdly there is a complex system of side ponds and feeders which would have acted as buffers for any differences in lock falls.

My conclusion was (and still is) that the flight was built conventionally but as traffic increased the flight of locks and in particular the trio became a bottleneck so the middle lock was enlarged to its present dimension in an attempt to relieve some of the congestion with minimum expenditure.

Lock 11 – ‘The Mystery Lock’

I have no idea whether this was successful but I believe it to be true and was probably devised at the whim of the local engineer or company secretary.

There is no doubt it is a unique feature in our canal system and I am pleased the local authorities are now taking action to stop further deterioration of the canal.'

Alan Oliver - Canal and River Carrier, Scotter, Gainsborough

The debate is still as strong today and follows the same key points. However, the biggest difficulty regarding the use of Lock 11 as a passing place is the dimensions of the shelves. There is considerable doubt that the shelves were big enough for the working boats to access them.

Perhaps it is as one child said on an educational visit to the site - 'I think it was a mistake'. Of one thing there is no doubt, the mystery will continue for some time yet!



Lime Kiln – Located just above Lock 11
Are the two structures linked in any way?

John Sergeant Visits Fourteen Locks



There is no doubt that Heritage Lottery Funding has increased the profile of the Cefn Flight of Locks tremendously. It attracted the attention of John Sergeant for his television series 'Britain's First Photo Album'. As part of the programme he interviewed Mary Bailey, the grand daughter of Henry Bailey, who was one of the last lock keepers to be employed by the Great Western Railway at Fourteen Locks. During Henry Bailey's time it was still very busy with horse drawn boats.



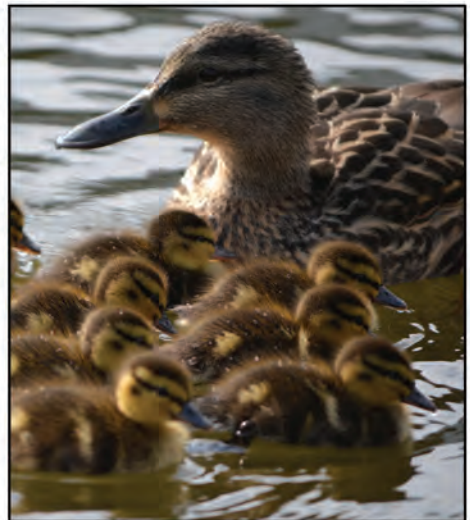
Wildlife Habitat



Heron on Patrol!

Fourteen Locks has importance not only for the people that use the site, it is also a significant wildlife habit and supports an abundance of different species.

Maintaining the site makes good sense to ensure that wildlife has an opportunity to thrive close to the city of Newport. Feeding the ducks is ever popular with visitors and locals alike. It is always a special time to see Mallards that have just hatched – but there is so much more to this rich, varied and beautiful environment!





Swans are infrequent Visitors – but are a joy to see!



Moorhens are always fascinating to watch!

Restoration – The Education Through Restoration Project



View from Lock 20 – Pre-Restoration May 2009

Locks 17 -20 Pre-Restoration

It is a testimony to the skills of the stonemasons employed in the building of the locks that they have survived largely intact, despite long years of inactivity. Nevertheless, the task of restoration is not one that should be underestimated, especially when the site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Care had to be taken with the smallest of details, all of which were monitored by Cadw and Headland Archaeology over the period of time that works were in progress.

Ingress of vegetation posed particular problems, where it was not possible to use machinery because of the risk of damaging the stonework. Some of the canal pounds and ponds were barely recognisable as canal features due to the extensive growth of trees, where again machinery could not be used due to the adverse effect of their weight on the canal bed.



View of Lock 19 – May 2009



View of Lock 18 – May 2009

Restoration – The Education Through Restoration Project



Work begins at Lock 20 – March 2010

The needs of the project meant patient clearance with hand tools and wheel barrows, echoing the labour intense methods employed in the original construction.

Removal of old mortar and debris was another labour intensive requirement as the lock chamber walls were prepared for re-pointing with lime mortar. In places, larger scale repairs were needed, necessitating the removal of layers of stone and subsequent rebuilding to ensure that the walls were strengthened for the injection of stabilising grout.

Restoration – The Education Through Restoration Project



Trimming The Oak!

In addition to the physical restoration of the locks an important aspect of the project was training and the transfer of skills. Training included the following:

- the mixing and application of lime mortar;
- the use of specialised tools – including the use of wood working tools for trimming the oak used in the construction of the lock gates. Although the lock gates were ‘made to measure’ each gate needed careful on-the-spot adjustment in order to ensure the best possible fit;
- the installation of the lock gates – including the installation of the ‘wooden quoins and cills’ to create water-tight seals, the installation of the metal ‘paddle-gear’ necessary for filling and emptying the locks and securing the metal collars used to keep the lock gates in position.



Lock 20 – Installing the first gate, July 2010.

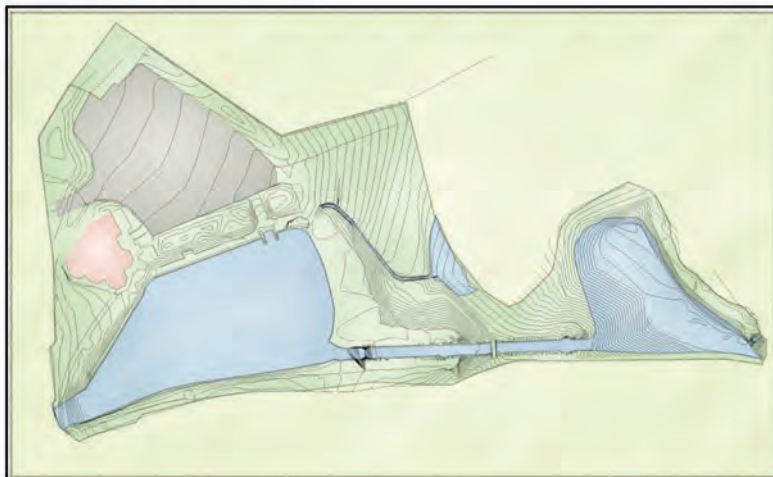


Lock 20 – Installing the first gate, July 2010

Restoration – The Education Through Restoration Project



Alongside the restoration, Headland Archaeology carried out a series of digital surveys that not only accurately recorded the water level drop for the entire flight as 167ft., but also enabled the production of digital maps of the restoration area



Restoration – Making Learning Fun!



Many schools, community groups and colleges have used Fourteen Locks to inspire creative learning.





Views of Lock 19
The Restoration has made a difference that matters!





Views of Lock 18 Pound
The Restoration has made a difference that matters!



Volunteering At Fourteen Locks

The Fourteen Locks Future Skills Project



The Old Lock Keeper's Cottage at Fourteen Locks c.1960

Volunteering

Volunteering on the 'Mon & Brec' has a long and proud history. In the Newport area you can trace the awakening of an interest to preserve and restore the canal to the 1960s when the Newport Canal Preservation Society was formed. It is likely that a member of the Society took the photograph of the old Lock Keeper's Cottage at Fourteen Locks. There are very few photographs in existence today of this cottage and without the keen interest shown by this person, we would have little idea of how the building once looked. Going a step further, you might say that you can trace everything that has happened in recent years at Fourteen Locks back to the formation of this group of dedicated volunteers.

Volunteering At Fourteen Locks

The Fourteen Locks Future Skills Project



Pirate day at Fourteen Locks – July 2015

Volunteering

Today, although the building is owned by Newport City Council, the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust manages and operates the Fourteen Locks Canal Centre. It's a successful partnership and a fitting memorial to the aspirations of the Newport Canal Preservation Society hangs proudly inside. Thanks to the support of the Heritage Lottery Funded Future Skills Project there are many opportunities to volunteer. The jobs are quite varied and range from assisting visitors to the Lock Flight to find out more about the canal to 'getting your hands dirty' by getting involved with the conservation team. There's something for everyone, if you have the time to spare or if you would like to gain work experience.



Volunteers are needed for Special Events





'Special Events' are held throughout the year.





The Canal Centre is also a 'Hub' for the Community. Volunteers play a crucial role in making this happen.





Volunteer Visitor Assistants play an important part in the daily operation of the Canal Centre.





The Fourteen Locks Canal and Countryside Volunteer Team is making a big difference to the local environment.





The conservation group has come about through partnership between the Monmouthshire, Brecon and Abergavenny Canals Trust and Newport City Council.





Heritage Lottery Funding has enabled the purchase of personal protective clothing. It's a great team and they go out in all winds and weathers!

